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SCRIPTURE

CHARACTERS.

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BY

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

IT is not mere affectation that makes me avoid the use of the title "Sermons" in designating the following papers. Nearly all of them were, in point of fact, written and delivered as pulpit discourses, either in the course of the Author's ordinary ministry or on particular occasions; and they will doubtless be found to bear the usual marks of compositions intended rather to be heard than to be read. But I would not wish them to be regarded as fair specimens of what I think the preaching of the gospel to a congregation, from Sabbath to Sabbath, ought to be. Not inadmissible at intervals, for the sake of variety—not inconsistent with evangelical doctrine, or incapable of a practical application—they are still not altogether what one would call "gospel sermons." At all events, I prefer that they should be judged by a somewhat more flexible and accommodating standard than I might myself apply to compositions professing to be the utterances of ambassadors for Christ, in the direct discharge of their commission, beseeching men to be reconciled to God.

For the very miscellaneous character of the volume some apology is due. A slight thread of connection may perhaps be traced in certain portions of it; and one or two subjects are pretty fully discussed. But for the most part, the papers are but desultory and fragmentary essays; suggesting topics of inquiry, rather than exhausting them; and neither fitted nor intended to demonstrate any one truth, or series of truths, in the system of Theological or Moral Science. On this account I have hesitated much about obtruding them on general notice, and I even suspended the publication for a considerable time. Circumstances, however, of no interest to the community, have led me to complete the work and consent to its issue. And such as it is, it may be welcome and useful to friendly readers.

Some of the papers have appeared in print before. They have undergone, however, such revision—often amounting almost to rewriting—that I can scarcely plead guilty to any charge of plagiarism from myself. I have endeavoured to present them in a form more worthy of preservation than the hasty publication of most of them at the time permitted.

I could have wished that, in appearing thus before the public, I had had a better reason to give for printing a book than the usual apologies which, if I chose, I might adopt. Had it been a treatise more evidently called for by the times, or more directly bearing upon the defence

of divine truth, the interests of society, or the advancement of scriptural knowledge, I might have been more justified in hazarding the publication. But let it pass. And, such as it is, may a blessing from on high accompany it!

EDINBURGH, 23*d May* 1850.

PREFATORY NOTE

TO

NEW EDITION OF SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS.

I HAVE been advised to publish the SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS in a separate form by themselves, reserving the MISCELLANIES for another volume. This accordingly is now done. A chronological arrangement also of the Characters is now, as far as practicable, adopted. The articles have undergone careful revision and correction; but no material change has been made as to their substance.

EDINBURGH, *April* 1857.

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SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS.

I.

THE UNIVERSAL CHARACTERISTIC—"AND HE DIED."

GEN. v. 5, 8, 11, 14, &c.

"And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation."
EXOD. i. 6.

THE succession of generations among the children of men has been, from Homer downwards, likened to that of the leaves among the trees of the forest. The foliage of one summer, withering gradually away, and strewing the earth with its wrecks, has its place supplied by the exuberance of the following spring. Of the countless myriads of gay blossoms and green leaves, that but a few months ago were glancing in the beams of the joyous sun, not one remains; but a new race, all full of brightness and promise as before, covers the naked branches, and the woods again burst forth in beauty and song, as if decay had never passed over any of their leafy boughs. So of men: "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth for ever" (Eccl. i. 4), —the same to the new generation that cometh—the same

scene of weary labour, endless vanity, alternate hope and disappointment—as if no warning of change had ever been given—as if the knell of death had never rung over the generation that is passing away.

But there is one point in which the analogy does not hold,—there is one difference between the race of leaves and the race of men: Between the leaves of successive summers an interval of desolation intervenes, and "the bare and wintry woods" emphatically mark the passage from one season to another. But there is no such pause in the succession of the generations of men. Insensibly they melt and shade into one another: an old man dies, and a child is born; daily and hourly there is a death and a birth; and imperceptibly, by slow degrees, the actors in life's busy scene are changed. Hence the full force of this thought—"One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh"—is not ordinarily felt.

Let us conceive, however, of such a blank in the succession of generations as winter makes in the succession of leaves. Let us take our stand on some middle ground in the stream of history, where there is, as it were, a break or a void between one series of events and another, —where the whole tide of life in the preceding narrative is engulfed and swallowed up, and the new stream has not begun to flow. Such a position we have in some of the strides which sacred history makes over many intervening years, from the crisis or catastrophe of one of the world's dramas to the opening of another: as, for instance, in the transition from the going down of Israel into Egypt in the days of Joseph, to their coming out again

in the time of Moses. Here is a dreary vacancy, as of a leafless winter, coming in between the scene in which Joseph and his contemporaries bore so conspicuous a part, and another scene in which not one of the former actors remained upon the stage, but "there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph." And the historian seems to be aware of the solemnity of this pause, when, dismissing the whole subject of his previous narrative, he records the end of all in these brief but most suggestive words,—"And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation."

The first view of this verse that occurs to us is its striking significance and force as a commentary on the history of which it so abruptly and emphatically announces the close. The previous narrative presents to us a busy scene—an animated picture; and here, as if by one single stroke, all is reduced to a blank. But now we saw a crowded mass of human beings—men of like passions with ourselves—moving and mingling in the eager excitement of personal, domestic, and public interests, like our own. They were all earnest in their own pursuits; and the things of their day were to them as momentous as those of our day are to us. They thought, and felt, and acted, and suffered; they were harassed by cares and agitated by passions; and, their restless energies contending with the resistless vicissitudes of fortune, the very earth they trod seemed instinct with life and the stern struggles and activities of life—when, lo! as by the touch of a magic spell, or the sudden turn of the hidden wheel,

the whole thronged and congregated multitude is gone, like the pageant of a dream, and the awful stillness of desolation reigns. It is as if having gazed on ocean when it bears on its broad bosom a gallant and well-manned fleet—bending gracefully to its rising winds, and triumphantly stemming its swelling waves—you looked out again, and at the very next glance beheld the wide waste of waters reposing in dark and horrid peace over the deep-buried wrecks of the recent storm. All the earth, inhabited by the men with whose joys and sorrows we have been sympathizing—Egypt, with its proud pyramids and palaces—Goshen, with its quiet pastoral homes—the rich land of Canaan—the tented deserts of Ishmael—all passes in a moment from our view; and there is before us, instead, a place of tombs, one vast city of silent death—Joseph is dead, and all his brethren, and all that generation.

What an obituary is here! What a chronicle of mortality! how comprehensive, yet withal how precise and particular—beginning with a particular intimation, and then swelling out into the most wide-sweeping and wholesale generality of announcement! In the first instance, the name is given—"Joseph died;" as if the intention were to enumerate in detail the whole. But the number grows and accumulates too fast—his brethren also died. These too might in part be specified—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah—Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin—Dan and Naphtali—Gad and Asher. But already the family branches out beyond the limits of easy computation, and all around there stands a mighty multitude, which arithmetic is too slow to reckon, and the pen of the ready

writer too impatient to register, and the record too small to contain; and all must, without name or remark, be summed up in the one indiscriminating notice—a notice all the more emphatical on that very account—"Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation."

"And all that generation:" How many thousands does this phrase embrace? and of how many thousands is this the sole monument and memorial? How startling a force is there in this awful brevity, this compression and abridgement—the names and histories of millions brought within the compass of so brief a statement of a single fact concerning them—that they all died! And these were men as alive as we are to the bustle of their little day—as full of schemes and speculations—as much wrapt up in their own concerns and the cares of the times in which they lived. Each one of them could have filled volumes with details of actions and adventures too important in his eyes to be ever forgotten; and yet all that is told of them in this divine record, and told of them as of an uncounted and undistinguished mass, is, that they all died. Or, if any particular individual has been selected for especial notice; if any one, by the leading of Providence, and by his own worth, has gained in this record an undying name; and if he has collected a small circle around him, who dimly and doubtfully stand out in his light and lustre, and are not quite lost in the common crowd;—still, he to whom prominence is given, and they who partly share his exemption from oblivion, are singled out only that they may be the better seen to have their part in the one event which happeneth alike to all; and

for each and all the same summary form of dismissal suffices,—"And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation."

Surely it seems as if the Lord intended by this bill of mortality for a whole race, which his own Spirit has framed, to stamp as with a character of utter mockery and insignificance the most momentous distinctions and interests of time; these all being engulfed and swallowed up in the general doom of death, which ushers in the one distinction of eternity.

I. Let us ponder the announcement as it respects the individual,—"Joseph died." Let us carry this intimation back with us into the various changes of his eventful life, invested as these are in our recollection with a peculiar charm by the affectionate associations and the fresh feelings of childhood. Does not the intimation impart to them all a still more touching and tender interest? We see Joseph a child—a boy—a youth at home—the favourite of a widowed father—the first pledge of a love now hallowed by death. We follow him with full sympathy through the petty plots and snares of a divided family, to which his frank and unsuspecting simplicity made him an easy prey; and when we think of him as even then, in boyhood, honoured by direct communications from above, and on that very account persecuted and hated by those who naturally should have cherished and watched over him; when we read of his unsuspecting readiness to meet them half way in their plans against him, and of the desperate malignity of these plans—the cruel deceit

practised on his aged parent, and his own narrow escape, his providential deliverance;—are we not touched by the reflection, that all this is but to lead to the brief conclusion, "Joseph died"? We accompany him to Egypt. We go with him into Potiphar's house, and rejoice in his advancement there. We share in his disgrace and degradation. Joseph in prison is to us like an old familiar friend. His innocence, his unsullied honour to his deceived master, his unshaken loyalty to his God, endear him to our hearts, and we burn with indignation at the wrongs he suffers. The dreams which he interpreted, the chief baker's fate, the chief butler's fault, all the particulars, in short, of his exaltation to royal favour—his rank at Pharaoh's court, his power over all Egypt, his policy in providing for the years of famine, his treatment of his father and his father's house—these circumstances in his history, the history which first won our heart in childhood, and longest retains its hold over us in age—these things give to the earthly career of Joseph an attractiveness and beauty in our fond esteem, equalling, nay, far surpassing, what we have ever found in any of the pictures of romance.

It may not be pleasant to cast over all this stirring picture the sullen gloom of death; yet it does invest it all with a sort of softened and twilight charm, like the peaceful shades of evening shed over a busy landscape; and it teaches, at all events, a salutary lesson,—to bear in mind, that prominent as was the station which Joseph occupied in his day, famous through all ages as his name has become, great and lasting as were the fruits of his measures

after he was gone, touching not the Israelites alone, but Egypt and all the world—he himself had to go the way of all flesh. His trials, with their many aggravations—his triumphs, with all their glories—were alike brief and evanescent; and his eventful career ended, as the obscurest and most common-place lifetime must end—for "Joseph died."

Read over again the history of Joseph with this running title, this continual motto, "And Joseph died." Call before your mind's eye its successive scenes; and as one by one they pass in review before you, and you gaze on the man of so many changes, let a loud voice ever and anon ring in your ears the knell, "And Joseph died." And try how this startling alarum will affect the judgment which you form and the emotions which you feel. Take each event by itself—isolate it, separate it from all the rest, bring it at once into immediate contact with the event which closes all—and see how it looks in the light, or in the lurid shade, of the tomb.

Joseph is at home, the idol of a fond parent. Ah! dote not, thou venerable sire, on thy fair and dutiful child. Remember how soon it may be said of him, and how certainly it must be said of him, that "Joseph died." Joseph is lost, and the aged father is disconsolate. He thinks of his son's bright promise, and of all that he might have been, had he been for a season spared. But grieve not, thou grey-haired patriarch. What though thy child has gone ere he has won life's empty prizes? Ah! think, though he had been left to win them all, how it must have come speedily to the same issue at the last,

and it must have been said of him that "Joseph died." Joseph is in trouble—betrayed, persecuted, distressed, wounded in his tenderest feelings, a stranger among strangers, a prisoner, a slave. But let him not be disquieted above measure, nor mourn over the loss of his prosperity. It will be all one to him when a few years are gone, and the end comes. It is but a little while, and it shall be said of him that "Joseph died." Joseph is exalted—he is high in wealth, in honour, and in power. He is restored to his father—he is reconciled to his brethren. But why should all his glory and his joy elate him? It will be nothing to him soon—when it comes to be said of him that "Joseph died." Ah! there is but one of Joseph's many distinctions, whether of character or of fortune, that does not shrink and shrivel beside this stern announcement. The simplicity of his trust in God, the steadfastness of his adherence to truth and holiness, the favour of Heaven, his charity out of a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned—these will stand the shock of collision with this record of his decease. And the one bright thought on which chiefly we love to rest when we read this record is, that he of whom we learn the tidings that he is dead, is the same Joseph whom we have heard uttering, under strong temptation, the noble sentiment, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"—the same Joseph of whom we have read in prison, that "the Lord was with him, and showed him mercy;"—the same Joseph whom we have seen in Pharaoh's presence disclaiming all personal credit, and giving glory to God alone—"It is not in me; God

shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace;"—the same Joseph who has spoken so kindly to his father and his brethren, soothing his father's death-bed with the promise that he shall indeed, as he so fondly wishes, lie with his sires in the promised land,—"I will do as thou hast said;" and relieving, with exquisite delicacy, the troubled consciences of his brethren,—"Fear not; ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good; I will nourish you and your little ones;"—and finally, the same Joseph who is found strong in faith when the hour of his own departure comes, hoping against hope, "making mention of the departing of the children of Israel, and giving commandment concerning his bones," saying, "God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence."

Yes, it is something to learn that it is such a man; one who fears to offend against God, who trusts in His mercy, and who glorifies Him before kings; one, moreover, so dutiful to his father, so generous and forgiving to his brethren; and one, in fine, so firm in faith to the last, and so joyful in hope of the inheritance of God;—it is something to learn that it is such an one, that it is Joseph, who is dead. There is comfort in the news that Joseph died. "The righteous is taken away from the evil to come"—"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." So "Joseph died"—

II. "And all his brethren." They too all died, and the vicissitudes of their family history came to an end in the silent tomb. That family history has its scenes

of tenderness and of trouble, of pathos and of passion, like other family histories before and since—scenes of similar though surpassing interest; and do not all these scenes derive a new interest and new significance from so solemn an intimation of death at the close? The actors in these scenes, the members of this family, would surely have thought and felt far otherwise than they did, had they reflected always how soon the time would come when, of all their joys and sorrows, their jealousies and heart-burnings, their rivalries and resentments, their feuds and reconciliations, their sins and their sufferings—when of all these the simple and solitary record would be, that "Joseph died, and all his brethren." Ah! how intimately should this reflection have knit them together in unity of interest, of affection, and of aim! The tie of a common origin is scarcely stronger or closer than the tie of a common doom. That they were all born in the same father's house is an argument of love that is greatly heightened and enhanced by the consideration, that soon it may and must be said of them that they are all gone to the same resting-place of the tomb.

The graves of a household, as they are dug one by one; the breaches in the little circle of home, made singly and in detail, as one and then another dear member is called away;—these are very impressive to you who remain, and stamp with a new character in your estimate all the intercourse which you have been wont to have. When individuals of a family depart, ah! does it not compel the survivors to review the past in a new light, and to think —alas! often in what bitterness of soul—on what terms,

and for what objects and ends, they have for long years been living together? The friend, the beloved brother who has gone, has acquired, by his death, new value in your esteem—a new and sacred claim to your regard. Now for the first time you discover how dear he should have been, how dear he was, to your hearts—dearer far than you had ever thought. How fondly do you dwell on all his attractions and excellencies! How do his faults and failings fade away from your eyes! And oh! with what a pang, and with what poignancy of grief, does the wounded soul brood over any passages of unkindness, any instances of neglect! How frivolous are all former causes of misunderstanding, all excuses for indifference, now seen to be! Death has stamped upon them all a character of most absolute insignificance; and bitter almost beyond endurance is the idea now, that for the sake of such trifles and vanities as are all the things of earth that breed coldness and suspicion among brethren, you have in any degree lost or wasted the season of friendly and familiar communion, so precious and so soon to close. How cheerfully would you give your all, if you could recall the lost one but for a day, or for an hour, that you might unburden your heavy heart, and exchange anew forgiveness and affection! With what warmth would you now meet, with what fulness of confidence and love would you embrace, him whom but yesterday, perhaps, you carelessly overlooked or cruelly offended! Would that you had known then how soon and how suddenly death was to claim him as its victim! Ah! you would have better improved the time of his remaining with you.

You would not have omitted so many opportunities of cultivating and enjoying his intimacy. You would not have delayed from day to day your purposes of kindness. You would not have been so readily and so frequently estranged from him. You would not have suspected, or envied, or provoked, or wounded him, as you have done. You would not have consulted so habitually your own selfish inclinations, or sought your own selfish ends, or indulged your own selfish passions. And, above all, you would not, in your dealings with him, have so exclusively regarded the things of time, and so grievously neglected the things of eternity. Ah! you would not have met so often, and so often parted, without one sentence or one mutual thought of godliness interchanged between you. You would have spoken more faithfully; you would have conversed and communed on the things that belong to your peace. You would have wept over sin together, and praised the love of the Saviour together, and prayed together, and joined together in works of faith and labours of love. Your reserve would have been far more completely laid aside, and God would have been far more fully acknowledged, and a "word in season" would have been uttered, and something, it may be, perilous to the soul of a dying sinner would have been left unsaid, if, when you last saw and conversed with your brother, you had had the slightest idea that he was so speedily to go to his long home.

And does this consideration lose its force when, by such a sentence as that before us, the members of a family are not, as it were, individually and one by one, but alto-

gether, and in one sweeping summons, called to pass from the shadows of time to the dread realities of the eternal world? Is there not an awful voice to families in this short, solemn note of death—"Joseph died, and all his brethren"? With their loves and hatreds, their fears and hopes, their family affections, such as they were, their family sins—they are all gone from this earth, and the place that once knew them knows them no more. And whither are they gone? And what are their views now, and what their feelings, on the matters which formed the subject of their familiar intercourse here? Are they united in the region of blessedness above? Are they formed again into a society in heaven, more happy and more stable than was their household on earth—Joseph and his brethren, the beloved Benjamin and the aged Jacob, all met in joy, to part no more for ever? Or is there a fearful separation, and are there some of their number on the other side of the great gulf,—vainly regretting the time when they would not cast in their lot with those who were faithful to their father's God? We dare not raise the curtain, or gaze even in imagination on the mysterious secrets of the invisible state. It is enough that they are all dead, and have left the many things about which they were careful, and have all now at last learned the lesson—"One thing is needful."

O would to God that the anticipation of the time when, concerning us and those with whom we are dwelling together in families, the final and summary record shall be, that we are dead and all our brethren, were sufficient to teach us that lesson now, ere it be too late! O that

God himself would persuade us now so to cultivate the charities of home, in the spirit and the hope of heaven, that to us and our brethren may be applied, in their highest and holiest and happiest sense, the words of David's lamentation over the father and son who fell together in the fight—"They were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided!" So "Joseph died, and all his brethren"—

III. "And all that generation." The tide of mortality rolls on in a wider stream. It sweeps into the one vast ocean of eternity all the members of a family,—all the families of a race. The distinctions alike of individuals and of households are lost. Every landmark is laid low. The various dates and manners of different departures are merged and overwhelmed in the one universal announcement, that of all who at one given time existed on the earth, not one remains—Joseph is dead, and all his brethren, and all that generation. Some are gone in tender years of childhood, unconscious of life's sins and sufferings—some in grey-headed age, weighed down by many troubles. Some have perished by the hand of violence—some by natural decay. Here is one smitten in an instant to the dust—there is another, the victim of slow and torturing disease. The strong man and the weak—the proud man and the beggar—the king and the subject—whether in prosperity and nursed by friends, or in dreary and desolate destitution, without a friend or brother to close the anxious eye—all are gone. The thousands have met their doom from a thousand different causes, and

in a countless variety of circumstances. War, famine, pestilence, have had their innumerable victims. Crime has carried off, in one undistinguishable crowd, the ministers that did his pleasure—the dupes that fell into his snares. Profligacy has slowly preyed on the pining souls and bodies of her votaries. Accident has suddenly snapped the thread of life. The tyrant, mingling men's blood with their sacrifices—the falling tower, crushing its inmates under its weight—fire seizing the midnight dwelling, or the lonely ship in mid ocean afar—the assassin's knife—the poisoning cup—or the weary wear and tear of a prolonged battle with life's ills,—all have achieved their triumphs over the proud race that lords it in this lower world. Grave after grave has been opened and filled; man after man has gone the way of all living; new bodies have been consigned to the silent tomb; new sets of mourners have gone about the streets. And now, of the entire multitude that at some one point of time occupied the earth, not one remains,—all, all are gone. Various were their pursuits, their toils, their interests, their joys, their griefs—various their eventful histories; but one common sentence will serve as the epitaph of all—"Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation."

And another generation now fills the stage—a generation that, in all its vast circle of families, can produce not one individual to link it with the buried race on whose ashes it is treading. Make for yourselves, in imagination, the abrupt transition which the historian here makes in his narrative—the sudden leap across an interval of years,

during which the gradual process of death and birth has been going on, ever emptying, but ever replenishing, the earth, and keeping it ever full. Make that interval, as he does, an absolute blank,—a dreary void,—a great gulf. Let the sleep or oblivion of a century come in between; and as you awake out of a trance, let it be amid a throng as eager and as intensely active as that which you left, but a throng in which you see "not the face of one old friend rise visaged to your view." It is the same scene as before; but ah! how changed!

On a smaller scale, you have experienced something of what we now describe. In the sad season of bereavement, how have you felt your pain imbittered by the contrast between death reigning in your heart and home, and bustling life going on all around! Oh! to step out from the darkened chamber of sickness, or the house of solitary woe, and stand all at once in the glare and amid the tumult of the broad and busy day; to see the sun shine as brightly, and the green earth smile as gladly, and all nature rejoice as gloriously as ever, while all to you is a blank; to hear the concord of sweet voices mocking your desolation; to mix with dreary heart in the unsympathizing crowd;—it is enough often to turn distress into distraction, and make you loathe the light and life that so offend your sadness! In the prospect, too, of your own departure, does not this thought form an element of the dreariness of death, that when you are gone, and laid in the silent tomb, others will arise that knew not you?—your removal will scarce occasion even a momentary interruption in the onward course and in-

cessant hurry of affairs, and your loss will be but as that of a drop of water from the tide that rolls on in its career as mighty and as majestical as ever.

But here, it is a whole generation, with all its families, that is engulfed in one unmeasured tomb! And, lo! the earth is still all astir with the same activities, all gay with the same pomps and pageantries, all engrossed with the same vanities and follies, and, alas! the same sins also, that have been beguiling and disappointing the successive races of its inhabitants since the world began!

Is there no moral in the shadow which this gigantic burial of a whole generation in a single brief text casts upon all these things? What are they all,—the joys and sorrows, the cares, the toils, the pleasures of time,—as the gate of eternity opens to shut in from our view, with one wide sweep, the millions that once used them, as we are using them now? What are they all, with the tears and smiles which they caused, to these millions, to whom but now they seemed to be everything? What will they all be to us, when of each one of us, as of Joseph, the simple record shall be, that "Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation?"

This funeral of a whole generation!—the individual, the family, and the entire mass of life, mingled in one common tomb!—surely it is a solemn thought. It appeals to our natural sensibility. But does it not appeal also to our spiritual apprehension? Natural sensibility is but little trustworthy. It is easily moved by such musings; and it is as easily composed. Violent emotion

and frivolous apathy are the extremes between which it vacillates and vibrates. To win and command its sympathies for the moment is an insignificant and unworthy triumph. Faith, on the other hand, finds matter of deeper and more lasting impression here. Death is the great divider. It severs families and cuts friendships asunder, breaking closest ties, and causing the most compact associations to fall in pieces. Coming as it does upon the race of men one by one,—singling out individually, one after another, its successive victims,—it resolves each hill or mountain into its constituent grains, taking separate account of every one of them, as separately it draws them into its insatiable jaws. But death is, after all, the great uniter too. Separating for a time, it brings all together at last. The church-yard opens its graves to part dearest brethren and friends; but soon it opens them again, to mix their kindred ashes in one common dust.

Is the union, however, that death occasions real, substantial, enduring?

"Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation." Death passed upon them all, for they all had sinned. It is the common lot—the general history—the universal characteristic.

And there is another common lot—another general history—another universal characteristic: "After death, the judgment." Joseph rises again, "and all his brethren, and all that generation." And they all stand before the judgment-seat. There is union then. The small and the great are there; the servant and his master—all are brought together. But for what? And for how long?—

"The wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

What a solemn contrast have we here! Death unites after separation: the judgment unites in order to separation. Death, closing the drama of time, lets the ample curtain fall upon its whole scenery and all its actors. The judgment, opening the drama of eternity, discloses scenery and actors once more entire. All die; all are judged: the two events happen alike to all.

And both are near; for the time is short,—the Lord is at hand.

But before death, before the judgment, is the gospel, which is now freely preached to all. And a voice is heard, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man open unto me, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Let this feast of love be begun in heart after heart, as one by one sinners die in Christ unto sin and live in Christ unto God. And when individuals, families, generations, are separated, and united, to be separated again—separated by death, united at the judgment, to be finally separated for eternity—may it be our privilege to meet at the marriage-supper of the Lamb, beyond which there is no parting any more for ever.

II.

ELI—HIS HEART TREMBLED FOR THE ARK OF GOD.

"I will judge his house for ever; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." "And Eli said, It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." "Eli sat by the wayside watching; for his heart trembled for the ark of God."—1 Sam. i.-iv.

Part First.

The key to Eli's character is in these simple words: "His heart trembled for the ark of God." He was a good man, but timid; faithful, but fearful; with much love in his heart to God and the ark of God, but with little strength of mind or firmness and decision of purpose. His conduct at this crisis may be contrasted with that of Moses on a similar occasion.

When the Israelites, discouraged by the report of the spies, refused to go up and take possession of the promised land, and were condemned, in consequence, to wander for forty years in the wilderness,—stung with remorse, they resolved hastily to repair their fatal fault: "They rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the Lord hath promised: for we have sinned." Not only did Moses strenuously oppose their resolution,—"It shall not prosper; go not up, for the Lord is not among you; that ye be not smitten before

your enemies;" he peremptorily refused either to lead them himself, or to let the ark of God go with them: "They presumed to go up unto the hill-top: nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and Moses, departed not out of the camp." The issue of the engagement was disastrous to the Israelites; for "the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah." But, thanks to the moral courage of Moses, the ark of God was safe (Numb. xiv. 40–45).

Eli is placed in circumstances not unlike those in which Moses acted so nobly. The army of Israel is smarting under a defeat sustained at the hands of the Philistines. It is proposed to send for the ark of God: "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies" (1 Sam. iv. 3). Eli being both high priest and chief magistrate—for he is at the head of civil affairs as well as ecclesiastical—has of course the custody of the ark; and has in fact, in virtue of his double office, more power over it than even Moses himself could possess. Evidently he has misgivings as to the step about to be taken; and well he may, considering all things. A heavy cloud of judgment overhangs himself and his household. If the ark is to accompany the army, it must be under the custody of his sons. Are they fit keepers of it, vile as they have made themselves, and doomed to perish miserably? Is the army itself engaged in so righteous a warfare, and animated by so good a spirit, as to warrant their carrying with them what, in better times,

was wont to be the pledge of victory? Eli may well hesitate; and, when the message from the army reaches him, it must cause him deep distress. Is he to consent? Hophni and Phinehas are ready to run every risk; not unwilling, perhaps, to seize the opportunity of somewhat recovering their character, and gaining a little credit with their countrymen. The elders and people are importunate. The old man does not resist, though in the very act of yielding his mind misgives him, and his heart cannot but tremble for the ark of God.

He is a godly man, and as kind as he is godly. The brief notices of his connection with Samuel are singularly affecting. He seems never to have forgotten the little injustice he had inadvertently done to his mother, Hannah, when he mistook her unwonted fervency in prayer for a sign of intoxication: "Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken" (1 Sam. i. 13). Observe how promptly and eagerly he accepts her explanation, and hastens to relieve her wounded spirit: "No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord" (ver. 15). "Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace; and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him. And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad" (ver. 17, 18). Thus he turns her weeping into joy.

And ever after he seems anxious to make up for that

first affront by his treatment of her son, whom the Lord gave her in answer to her many prayers, and whom, in terms of her own vow, she gave to the Lord. The child, Samuel, is warmly welcomed by him when his mother leaves him, while yet an infant, under his care; and as he "grows on, and is in favour both with the Lord, and also with men" (1 Sam. ii. 26), he shares the home, perhaps even the chamber, of his venerable guardian;—the parents, as they pay their annual visit to Shiloh, receive his blessing; and the youthful servant of the sanctuary is to Eli, as it might seem, instead of his own sons.

With what affectionate tenderness does Eli initiate Samuel in the right manner of receiving the word of the Lord! Eli, old and well-nigh blind, is "laid down in his place;" and Samuel hearing himself called by name, naturally starts up to ask what service his now almost helpless friend may be requiring from him: "Here am I, for thou didst call me." "I called not, my son; lie down again;" is the simple reply, until the third repetition of the incident awakens Eli to its real meaning: "Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child" (1 Sam. iii. 8). Nor is there any grudging in the old man's bosom that he should be passed by, and another, a mere child, chosen to receive one of those divine communications which in those degenerate days had become so precious, because so rare (ver. 1). On the contrary, we almost seem to see the lighting up of his dim eye, and to feel the throbbing of his heart, as with tenderest interest he tells the favoured youth how to demean himself under so high an honour: "Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call

thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth" (ver. 9); and then he quietly composes himself to await the issue of the scene.

Ah! little did he dream what the issue was to be! Some fond thoughts he might have as to the sort of voice or vision from on high likely to mark the beginning of a child's—and such a child's—prophetic ministry. Something bright, something encouraging, something charged with the fulness of divine love and heavenly joy, will probably form the appropriate subject of the Lord's first message or address to so gracious a youth. Alas! alas! little thinks the old man that Samuel's office, like Jeremiah's afterwards, is to open with denunciations of wrath and judgment; still less, that these denunciations are to be directed against himself. Eli has been warned already by a man of God, and warned in language of terrible distinctness, that he and his whole house are to be cut off with dishonour from the earth (1 Sam. ii. 27-36). Must the warning be repeated? and must it be through the lips of the child he has so fondly cherished? And must it be the very first word these lips are to be inspired to utter in the name of the Lord? A hard and cruel trial this might well be thought to be.

No wonder that "Samuel feared to show Eli the vision," and that it was only after the most solemn and urgent importunity on the part of Eli—"God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide anything from me"—that he could find it in his heart to "tell him every whit, and hide nothing from him." Nor would it have been any wonder, if, on hearing such a message conveyed

through such a messenger, some little of the irritation of wounded love had ruffled Eli's spirit, and some impatient words had escaped from his mouth. But nothing of the kind appears. The grey-haired saint of God is as a little child, and meekly takes rebuke from the little child he has himself nursed. Reversing the prophecy, "The child shall die a hundred years old,"—the man all but a hundred years old is to die a child: for it is the "quiet spirit and mild" of a little child that breathes in the simple utterance, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good."

What a soul is Eli's! Truly, his "soul is even as a weaned child," (Ps. cxxxi.) What else could have made him so gentle when he heard, out of the mouth of a mere babe, as it might seem, and one too who "had eaten of his own meat and drunk of his cup, and had lain in his bosom, and been unto him as a son," such unmitigated threatenings as these?—"Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house; when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever" (1 Sam. iii. 13, 14).

Think of Samuel, the child Samuel, having such a message to deliver! Think of Eli, the venerable Eli, having such a message, so delivered, to receive! No

doubt, his conscience testified that he had grievously sinned, and deserved many stripes; but severity so pitiless as this—wrath, as it might seem, so unrelenting, after so long a time of service, during the whole of which, however weak and indulgent he may have been to others, he has himself been faithful to his God—might be felt as treatment that it was very hard to understand, and harder still to endure. He might almost have been tempted to cry out with Cain, "My punishment is greater than I can bear." And that it should be the very hands so often clasped in holy adoration between his own knees, that were now selected to strike the blow, and the very lips he had himself taught to lisp in prayer, that were to pour forth the oracle of vengeance and of woe against him—was it not a strange and sad aggravation of the distress? was it not, in a sense, like "seething a kid in its mother's milk?"

But, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." What acquiescence is here! what patience! what faith! There is no justifying of himself—nothing like charging God foolishly. The old man's "sin is ever before him." He acknowledges it all to the Lord. He owns the perfect righteousness of the sentence. God is just in judging. Eli's mouth is stopped. He is verily guilty. That he should be thus rebuked and chastened is no more than he deserves; nay, it may even be fitting that the stroke should come through that dear child, in whose opening and expanding graciousness of character he has been apt, perhaps, too readily to find comfort and compensation for

the unbridled license of his own sons. For it could not but be a more congenial task to Eli to train the docile Samuel than to restrain unruly Phinehas and Hophni; and there might be something of retribution in the arrangement, that the very first act of Samuel's ministry, in the prophetic office for which Eli had with so fond and deep an interest been preparing him, should be, to denounce the parent's neglect of parental discipline and duty, and open his eyes to all its inexcusable guilt. At all events, Eli makes no complaint. There is no feeling of even momentary resentment, either against God or against Samuel. He sees nothing amiss, either in the dreadful message or in the channel through which it comes. He blames only himself. Samuel is as dear to him as ever, although reluctantly the bringer of evil tidings. And God is honoured by the exercise, not of a mere stern and stubborn bravery, submitting sullenly to an irrevocable and irresistible decree, but of a meek faith;—faith accepting judgment, and yet clinging to and confiding in the very judge himself; faith, in short, still seeing, even in the God of judgment, a pacified and reconciled God,—a father and a friend! "O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. Have mercy upon me, O Lord; oh save me for thy mercies' sake. The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping; the Lord hath heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer," (Ps. vi.)

Such a man is Eli,—so godly, so gracious and kind; the very "meekness and gentleness of Christ" might be

supposed to characterize him. But, alas! he is deficient in that quality which alone can give to all other good dispositions their proper weight and value,—the quality of which the Apostle Paul speaks when he says, "Add to your faith, virtue," or valour, fortitude, and moral courage. His deficiency in this respect comes sadly out in all the relations which he has to sustain as a ruler,—in the State, in the Church, and in the Family.

1. Eli was head of the State. He was a judge in Israel. He was the last but one in the succession of judges or rulers,—coming after Samson as it is generally thought, and having only Samuel as his successor; for the kingly power soon superseded that of the judges, in the person, first of Saul, and then of David. As a judge, in his capacity of civil governor, Eli saw the affairs of the Jewish commonwealth brought to the lowest ebb of fortune. It is true, that little or nothing is recorded of his administration; but in the last act of it, the war waged with the Philistines, and in the way in which that war is conducted, we see indications of imbecility not to be mistaken. (1 Sam. iv.) There is an evident want of due consideration and concert. The contest is obviously begun rashly, without a previous appeal to God; and the army marches without the divine sanction: (for the first clause in the first verse of the chapter, "And the word of the Lord came to all Israel," is to be connected with the previous chapter; it indicates the general acceptance of Samuel in his prophetic character, and has nothing to do with the Philistian war.) The expedition, then, wants that symbol of the divine presence which of

old was wont to strike terror into the foe, and to inspire every heart in the host of Israel with holy zeal;—according to the usage described in the book of Numbers: "And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel" (Numb. x. 35, 36). No such ringing battle-cry, "Rise up, Lord," is heard on this occasion; and no glad note of peace concludes the fight. The sudden expedient, the desperate after-thought, of summoning the ark to help in retrieving the disaster, only brings out more sadly the absence of all sound and godly counsel in the whole affair at the first; and the conduct of Eli is throughout that of a habitual waverer. One thing is clear,—as a ruler, he left the State on the very brink of ruin.

2. As high priest, set over the affairs of the House of God, he lets his weakness still more shamefully get the better of him. The scandalous outrages and excesses committed by his two sons when they were associated with him in the priesthood, never could have taken place had "things been done decently and in order." The law as to offerings, and as to the several shares which the altar, the priesthood, and the worshippers, were to have in them, was clear enough, if due authority had been put forth to enforce it; nor, with all their greed, could Hophni and Phinehas have so used their flesh-hooks as to make "men abhor the offering of the Lord," if there had not been prevalent already a grievous laxity in the mere

routine of the tabernacle service. This laxity Eli must have tolerated; at least he wanted firmness to repress it (1 Sam. ii. 12-17). Need we point to the still grosser infamies, that made the holy place of the Most High resemble the abominable dens of moral pollution to be found in the heathen temples (ver. 22)? Such foul wickedness never could have been so practised by the most abandoned of mankind, except under a state of things implying the most deplorable misrule. We do not speak of the actual misconduct of the miserable young men themselves, who prostituted to these vile purposes their priestly character and office; we found rather on the mere fact, that misconduct like theirs was possible, as proving that the reins of spiritual government must have fallen into the hands of one himself either very wicked or very weak. And as, in the case of Eli, the former side of the alternative is out of the question—for he was a holy man, and hated sin—we are forced to conclude, that in his capacity of priest, as well as in that of judge, he was the victim of indecision and imbecility.

3. But it is as a parent that he chiefly shows his weakness; and it is in that character that he is especially reproved and judged. "Thou honourest thy sons above me," is the charge which the Lord brings against him (chap. ii. 29). And yet Eli feared God, and had no sympathy with his sons in their vile crimes. On the contrary, he remonstrated with them faithfully: "Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one

man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?" (chap. ii. 23-25.) What more could he do? Instruction, admonition, expostulation, persuasion, are all in vain. The resources of his parental influence are exhausted. What further remains to be tried?

Ah! he forgets that he is invested with parental authority—authority, in his case, backed and seconded by all the powers of law and all the terrors of religion. Nay, it is not so much that he forgets this, as that he has not nerve to act upon the recollection of it. He knows his right and duty as a father; but he weakly shrinks from enforcing his right and performing his duty, out of false tenderness and pity to his sons.

And what construction does God put upon his weakness?—"Thou honourest thy sons above me." Is it not a harsh construction? Is no allowance to be made for his parental feelings? He does not mean deliberately to prefer his sons to God; and if he fails to execute the full measure of severity that their offences merit, and his position warrants, is it not hard to ascribe the failure to a want of respect for God? Might it not rather be allowed to pass as the venial, and even amiable, infirmity of parental love?

No. For it is not really parental love, according to any right view of that pure affection, but self-love at bottom that Eli indulges, and self-love in one of its least respectable forms. It is himself that Eli is unwilling to mortify, not his sons. It is to himself that he is tender, not to them. And when it is considered that his selfish

feebleness and fondness show themselves in his neglect of parental discipline even in matters in which the divine honour is immediately concerned, it is not too much to say that he is preferring his children to his God.

How offensive to God must be a parent's want of firmness in enforcing his authority! For what, in fact, is that authority but the authority of God himself? God has delegated his own authority to the parent; and, so far as the parent has any right of rule at all over his child, he has it as representing God. In the exercise of it, therefore, he has properly no discretion. If he rule as God, he must rule for God; and to let any partial leaning of the natural heart towards his child tempt him to act as if it were otherwise,—as if he ruled in his own right and for himself, and not in God's right and for God, and might, in consequence, please himself or his child as he sees fit,—this is evidently to usurp a power independent of that of God,—it is to dishonour the Lord of all.

How this sin of Eli's, in his treatment of his sons, commenced, we cannot tell; probably in their early childhood, when their evil dispositions began to show themselves, and he spared the rod and withheld correction. What his sin was, is very precisely pointed out;—"he restrained them not." Doubtless he taught them; surely he prayed for them; he certainly exhibited to them the example of a holy and blameless life;—but he restrained them not. At first, he might have restrained them with comparatively a very gentle hand: a firm voice, a decided look, might have been enough; a few instances of patient, persevering determination, with an absence of all angry

passion provoking them to wrath, might have taught the little rebels how hopeless it was to think of making their father yield to them; judicious kindness, not being bitter against them, would have made them feel the relief and gladness of yielding to him; and thereafter he might have guided them with his eye. Failing at that first stage to form in them the habit of obedience, Eli's task became of course more difficult as his sons grew in strength and stature, as well as in force of will. The waywardness and impetuosity of early youth, succeeding to the insubordination of spoiled and fondled childhood, presented a stouter aspect of resistance or defiance. Still he might have restrained them; his parental resources were not yet exhausted; they had not yet outgrown the power of the parental arm, nor could they yet dispense with the support of parental love. He has a hold over them still by many ties, if only he will summon resolution for the task of first thoroughly studying their characters, and then vigorously and wisely using bit and bridle, if need be, to keep them in. It may be a struggle; but calm consistency will gain the day. For a parent's rule commends itself to the conscience, as a parent's kindness touches the heart; and an effort put forth even at the last hour, in faith and prayer, to resume the reins of parental discipline, will have the countenance of God, and will not fail of success. But, alas for Eli! This second opportunity also is allowed to pass. His sons have become men; they have left the parental roof; they have families of their own; they take rank on their own account in the world; they hold office in the Church. They

are their own masters now, and, availing themselves of their liberty, they let loose their unruly passions and make themselves vile. Still Eli should have restrained them; for it is expressly mentioned, that his not restraining them even then was his sin. He had power to restrain them. He had the power every parent has, when his children make themselves incurably vile,—he could disown them, discountenance them, solemnly renounce their fellowship, and cast them off. He had power also as their ruler in the state, and their superior in the priesthood. And every consideration of decency and good order, as well as of godliness and virtue, should have made him use his power to the utmost, and adopt the most decided measures, when they were making the very sanctuary a foul scandal. But he had not the heart; he could not bring himself to be severe. Even God's highest honour must give place to the indulgence of his fond and feeble dotage. And the issue is, that "the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged for ever."

It is an issue, as to all the parties concerned, sufficiently disastrous.

For the sons of Eli, whom "he did not restrain," what hope is there? Sudden destruction comes upon them. There may be a show and semblance of adventurous patriotism in their readiness to bear the ark, as a forlorn hope, into the midst of Israel's renewed battle with the Philistines. But, with all their daring, they carry into the fight a weight of guilt and a crushing sentence of wrath, that cannot but be fatal. They perish miserably.

Will it alleviate the pang of a sudden and violent death —will it allay the burning torments of the fire that is not quenched—to think of their indulgent father, who did not restrain them? Eli may well be cut to the heart as the reflection comes across him, that possibly, had he restrained his sons, they might not have made themselves so vile and perished so miserably. But will any such reflection avail them? On the contrary, will not the very fondness of Eli, which they have so foully abused, add a scorpion-sting to the gnawing of the worm that dieth not? In spite of all his ill-judged leniency and want of firmness to restrain them, he was the kindest of parents and the holiest of men. These unnatural and ungrateful sons knew this right well. Many a holy thought was associated with their father's image; many a tender tear; many a fervent prayer. The very mildness of his pleading with them—"Why do ye such things? Nay, my sons; it is no good report that I hear"—that gentleness which at the time only emboldened them to scoff and sneer—must enhance their agony when their sin finds them out; and whatever fault his extreme paternal fondness may be in him, and however sharply it may be visited upon him, assuredly it is not fitted to be even so much as a drop of cold water to their parched tongues, when in hell they lift up their eyes, being in torments.

Of the utter ruin of Eli's household we need not speak. The priesthood passes away from his family; the government is upon other shoulders; his seed are a beggared race. The last incident recorded concerning his children

is most profoundly touching; it is the birth of his grandson, the child of his son Phinehas. The unhappy mother hears of her husband Phinehas, fallen in the disastrous fight; and of her father-in-law Eli, suddenly dead. She cannot stand the shock. She bows her head and the pangs of premature travail are upon her. The women about her say, "Fear not, for thou hast born a son." But there is no joy for her because a man-child is born into the world. She is a godly woman, broken-hearted by the sin and fate of an ungodly husband. She is like-minded with her husband's godly father, Eli. When the women tell her of the son she has born, "she answers not, neither regards it." But with her dying breath she names the child "Ichabod;" for she says "The glory is departed from Israel, because the ark of God is taken."

The whole house of Eli is a ruin;—the priesthood degraded; the nation defeated; the ark taken; and, amid the wreck, his own family broken up, and the sole survivor launched on the stream of time with an ominous name, and under a heavy curse. And all this in connection with one of the meekest and holiest of the saints of God! It is a terrible lesson. And, in keeping with it, is the lesson taught by the melancholy notice of his own decease.

For in truth there is not anywhere in the Bible—and, if not there, certainly nowhere else—a more affecting picture than that of the aged Eli, sitting on the watch for tidings of the disastrous battle which was to be fought on the day when he allowed the ark to be

carried from its home at Shiloh to the camp of Israel at Eben-ezer.

He had many things to make his heart tremble. He had a deep stake in the fight, on which issues most vital to him, both public and domestic, depended. It seems to have been a critical death-struggle between the two armies, which was to decide the fate of their respective nations; and Eli, as a patriot, must have had many an anxious thought as he brooded over the alternative of his country's liberty or bondage, which one brief and bloody hour might fix for ages. Nor could he be insensible to the fate of the many thousand brave hearts that, ere the setting of the sun, must cease to beat, and the many mothers in Israel that must be made to mourn. And, besides these public cares, he had his two sons on that field of battle, with a dark and heavy prophecy of judgment hanging over their heads; which, whatever they in their profligate impiety might think of it, their devout, though, alas! too fond father, could never dismiss for a moment from his memory.

It was not any of these things, however, that moved the old man most deeply: "His heart trembled for the ark of God."

For this, he sat upon a seat by the wayside watching. And when he heard the noise of the tumult in the city —as the man of Benjamin, running out of the army, with clothes rent and earth on his head, came into the city, and told the woful tale which made all the city cry out—the old man stretched forth his palsied arms and strained his sightless eyes. "What is there done,

my son?" is his eager question to the messenger. "And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken" (1 Sam. iv. 17).

The messenger of evil delivered his tidings; and his hearer could stand the accumulation of horrors—Israel fled before the Philistines—a great slaughter among the people—ay, and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, dead also. But when the crowning calamity burst upon him —"the ark of God is taken"—Eli could bear up no longer. Bending under the weight of ninety and eight years, and crushed by the stunning blow of this disastrous intelligence, "he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died; for he was an old man, and heavy."

No words could add to the pathos of this sad and simple announcement. It is all the epitaph which Scripture has for one who had spent nearly a century beside the altar, and for somewhat less than half that time had occupied the seat of power—for "he had judged Israel forty years." Such was the end of so protracted a life; thus miserably died this man of God.

Many practical remarks suggest themselves in connection with the painful history which we have been considering—remarks applicable to parents and members of families, to individual Christians, to the ungodly, and to all.

1. It is a most emphatic warning that the fate of Eli gives to parents; and not to parents only, but to all who have influence or authority of any sort in families. Whoever in a family has any power at all to restrain evil, and fails to use that power to the uttermost, incurs a responsibility from which a thoughtful man would shrink. The power may be of various kinds; it may be superior strength, or superior station, or weight of character, or example, or that control which seasonable and tender affection wields, and gratitude gladly owns. But whatever it be, let it be faithfully and fully used. The positive duty lying upon all heads and members of households, to seek one another's good in the highest and most spiritual sense, is not more binding, and scarcely more important, than the negative duty of restraining one another's evil. Nor is this a harsh or invidious task. It may be done with all the meekness and gentleness of Christ. And the secret of its being rightly and effectively done is this: Let no one, let nothing, be honoured above God; let God be honoured above all. Let your intercourse with children, or brothers, or sisters, or domestics, or any with whom you dwell together in families, be upon this principle. Honour God,—honour God supremely,—honour God alone. Consider not merely what may be best for them, but what, in every instance, is due to God. This will prevent compromise, concession, and fond indulgence on your part; while it will place your power of restraining evil on the highest of all grounds of advantage,—the law and the will of God himself.

2. Let individual Christians ponder the lesson of Eli's character. Much, very much, there is in it to be admired and imitated, especially the grace and godliness of his walk, the tenderness of his affections, and the manner in which he takes the divine rebuke. But his defects—or, let us say at once, his sins—are recorded for our especial warning. The first of these, his want of firmness, is a very sad one; it mars and hinders the exercise of every other grace, and stamps upon the whole man the character of one like a wave of the sea, driven by the winds and tossed. "Add to your faith virtue," or moral courage, is a precept to be again and again repeated and pondered well. But another fault in Eli is that which is so emphatically rebuked by God,—he honoured his sons above God; or, in other words, he did not honour God with an entirely undivided and undistracted heart. "How can ye believe," said our Lord to the Jews, "which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" And if seeking honour from any but God is a fatal obstacle in the way of guileless faith,—giving honour to any besides God is a serious and dangerous hinderance in the way of holy obedience.

3. Let the ungodly tremble. Let them look on, and see how God deals with sin in his own people. Does he spare sin in them? Does he spare them in their sins? Behold the severity of God in his treatment of the good and gracious Eli, and tremble at the thought of what may be his treatment of you! "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinners appear?" Or as a greater than Eli reasoned, when, bearing the

cross up the hill of Calvary, he pointed to his own sufferings for sin as a pledge and presage of judgment against sinners,—"If these things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"

4. And, finally, let all lay to heart the irrevocable decree and determination of God, that sin shall not pass unpunished; let them look and see the end of the ungodly, while they stand in awe at the chastisement of the just. Whatever excuse the wicked may frame out of the weakness of those who should have restrained them; and whatever promise the just may plead, as warranting assurance and good hope through grace; the law of the divine procedure is fixed, as announced to Eli and his sons: "I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever; but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. ii. 30).

III.

ELI—A GODLY MAN TREMBLING FOR THE ARK OF GOD.

"His heart trembled for the ark of God."—1 Sam. iv. 13.

PART SECOND.

In the circumstances, as we have seen, Eli's heart might well tremble, and could not but tremble, for the ark of God. That sacred symbol was put in peril; nor was there anything, either in the composition of the army or in the character of the fight, to allay the apprehension that might be awakened. On the contrary, whether he considered into what hands the ark had fallen, when it was carried into the camp under the charge of his unhappy sons; or pondered on the circumstances that led to its being sent for, and the use to which it was to be applied; the old man had more than one good reason for apprehension and alarm.

The same reasons, alas! might cause the heart of many an Eli now to tremble for the ark of God; whether the holy veteran looked to the sort of company which has assumed, or accepted, the guardianship of that sacred symbol; or to the exigencies which demand, and the motives which prompt, the risking or committing of what is God's, on the uncertain field of human controversy and strife. Our subject may thus branch out into

two topics:—I. The heart trembling for the ark of God on account of the hands that bear or defend it; and, II., The same anxiety caused by the occasions and circumstances which serve to bring it forward in battle, and to peril it on the issue. The first of these topics will chiefly occupy our attention, the second being but briefly noticed.

I. The mixed and motley character, the very miscellaneous composition, of the army in whose hands the ark of God seems to be placed, may well cause the heart of an Eli to tremble. Let any thoughtful man cast his eye along the ranks—alas! how broken and disordered—of the host that should be fighting the Lord's battle, and can his heart fail to tremble?

In the first place, there are those whose mere bodily presence is all that can be reckoned on,—the lukewarm and indifferent,—the treacherous and false,—the men who have joined the standard on compulsion, or in the crowd, or to serve a purpose,—disguised spies and traitors in the enemy's interests, or soldiers of fortune, fighting every one for himself. "Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?" "Thy people," says Jehovah to our Lord, the Captain of our salvation, the Conqueror out of Zion, the Ruler in the midst of his enemies—"thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." They shall be all volunteers,—no pressed men among them; they shall be all in ear-

nest. That indeed will be the day of his power, when his people are thus willing; the day of his power in a double sense;—the day when, in the first place, he makes them all willing, with the rod of discipline and doctrine wielded by his own Spirit,—thinning perhaps the columns, yet by that very process inspiring new courage and giving new compactness to those that remain; and when, secondly, he uses that band of brothers for mightier conquests and triumphs than have ever yet been dreamed of. Gideon's proclamation, "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart;" ay, and besides this appeal to conscience, some Gideon-like test, some trial appointed by the Lord himself, whether it be the lapping of water or the baptism of fire; must go before that "breaking of the yoke of Zion's burden, the staff of his shoulder and the rod of his oppressor," which is to be as another day of Midian: "for every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood, but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire."*

It is no strife this for mere hireling mercenaries; or

* Judges vii.; Isa. ix. 4, 5, where this comparison occurs between the victory of Christ and that of Gideon, in immediate connection, on the one hand, with that brief picture of restored peace after successful war which goes before: "Thou hast multiplied the nation, and increased to him the joy *(marginal reading—or, whose joy thou hadst not increased)*: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil;" and, on the other hand, with that glorious doxology or song of praise that follows (ver. 6, 7): "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

for reluctant recruits, enlisted in a fit of temporary excitement, and almost unawares, and now kept in the camp only because they are ashamed, or are not allowed, to draw back; or for officious allies, encumbering the real force with their intrusive self-sufficiency. The Lord needs no such aid for any purpose of his,—his own zeal will perform it; and it will be a zeal whose cleansing and sifting power his own troops may have to experience in the first instance, before he pours out its fury on his foes. They are not all accessions that the Church receives, as its numbers are filled up from among the people of the land. The "mixed multitude" who go up with the children of Israel out of Egypt, "fall a lusting" themselves, and spread discontent and weeping throughout all the tribes; and when the sacred deposit is in the custody of such hands, the godly man may indeed tremble for the ark of God. These are they who, if they are not conscious and wilful hypocrites, making a gain of godliness, yet almost seem to think that they compliment God by giving in their adherence to his cause, and consenting to take charge of his ark; and make no scruple about bearing it ostentatiously before them into the very heart of the enemy's country, and the thickest throng of the ungodly; having no fear, no misgiving, as to their being able to bear it in safety through, or to retrieve and repair any temporary damage it may sustain.

Oh! how does our heart tremble for the ark of the Lord, when we see so many lightly taking upon them the Christian name, and making the Christian profession with little of anything like an adequate and serious

sense of what so solemn a pledge implies. Alas! how many do we see rushing to the Lord's table to-day, and frequenting the haunts of vanity to-morrow,—exposing their Christian character, in the very flush and bloom of its newly-budding freshness, to the withering blight of a worldly atmosphere and worldly conversation. They profess, and perhaps feel, not a little devotion in the sanctuary, although at home, and in the social circle, they make it too plain to their ungodly companions that there is really no very essential difference between them. They refuse to come out and be separate, so as to shun and shrink from the very touch of the unclean thing; while still they dream of preserving sufficiently entire all the pure grace and holy beauty of their blood-washed raiment, and all the tenderness and truth of their filial reverence and love, as the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty. Is it any wonder, then, that the cause of God languishes, and conversions are few, and iniquity abounds, and the adversary waxes bold, and many an aged believer's heart—but lately perhaps cheered with the hope of a better day, as the Lord seemed to be leading his Church out into the wilderness, and there reviving her—begins again to tremble for the ark of God!

But, secondly, there are those in the camp who are not thus insincere and false,—who are, nevertheless, disabled and enfeebled by some rankling inward wound, some corroding grief, some sad sense of insecurity, or of a doubtful right to be themselves there, and to have the

ark among them. On the occasion before us, the Israelites had just been smitten in a previous battle with the Philistines; and it was as defeated men that they were about to take the field again. True, they had now got possession of what was wont to be a pledge of victory. Their elders, in proposing to bring down the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh, had assured them that whenever it came it would save them out of the hands of their enemies; and the multitude, ready to grasp at any lie and trust in any spell, had welcomed with mad joy the consecrated symbol, and made the earth ring again with their shouting. But were there no sad countenances and grave looks, as this ill-timed scene of premature exultation went on? Were there no ears on which the rude clamour of that noisy mirth struck as a funeral knell? And when the first drunken and senseless fit of enthusiasm was over, were there none among the shouters themselves whose hearts began to misgive them,—who, hurried along in the first tumultuous burst of the contagious rapture, had since got leisure to reflect, and found too good cause to despond?

We may imagine some such little group of thoughtful men, as the shout arose, or at least as the shout fell, opening to one another their minds, and exchanging words of fear: 'It is so far well to see the army in good heart, and, instead of the lamentations of defeat, to hear the brave note of defiance again; but is all this confidence justly warranted? The ark, indeed, is with us; but in what spirit has it been sent for, and in what spirit received? If it be right to take it down with us into the

second battle, it must have been wrong to go without it to the first. By thus seeking to have God in the midst of us now, we confess that he was not in the midst of us before, and that it was in our own strength that we fought. Have we repented of our sin? Is it out of a returning sense of duty that we now hasten to repair our sad omission; or is it by a mere feeling of superstition, and on the pressure of extreme necessity, that we are driven to avail ourselves of this high refuge? If so, can we expect that it will stand us in stead? Its presence has not always saved our armies in time past; nor will it now, if it be all that we have to look to,—if there be no searching of heart among us, no humiliation before God, and no turning with weeping and lamentation to him. The elders themselves, in the proposal they made to us to send for the ark in our straits, submitted to us a solemn question in reference to our former defeat (ver. 3): "Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to-day before the Philistines?" Has that question been duly weighed and faithfully answered? If not, with all the security which the ark of God is fitted and designed to give—ay, and that multiplied a hundredfold—can we dare to hope for a better issue in the enterprise which we are about to undertake to-morrow?'

Thus, they that feared the Lord might have much talk one with another, both as to the state of mind in the army generally, and as to their own condition in particular. And if such a feeling of doubt, respecting others or respecting themselves, began to spread like a panic through the ranks, it was they, and not the enemy, that

had the best reason to be afraid. The Philistines might rally and recover themselves after the first surprise occasioned by this new device: for they might shrewdly suspect that it was no honest faith in their God that moved the Israelites to resort to it, but the mere helplessness of despair; and they might gather courage in the end, rather than lose it. The Israelites themselves, however, or at least the serious and thoughtful among them, could scarcely get so easily over the consciousness of guilt and of guile; and sympathizing in these sentiments even at a distance, as the godly Eli could not fail to do, what marvel if, as he sat and watched, his heart trembled for the ark of God?

Is there anything analogous to this state of feeling among us?—Let all, as they read, inquire; and let us inquire with reference not only to our standing as individual believers, but to the congregation with which we are associated, the community to which we belong, and the Church of Christ generally. Let us consult first and principally our own personal experience. We have failed, perhaps, hitherto once, or it may be more than once, in maintaining the Lord's cause, and resisting the enemies of our peace. We have yielded in the struggle with our evil hearts of unbelief, and with the world, the devil, and the flesh. We have sustained a sad and shameful defeat, and left the field of battle thickly strewed with the fragments of our shivered shields and swords,—our broken promises, and resolutions, and vows,—our unanswered, because unwatched and unheeded prayers.

Is this indeed our case? Are our consciences thus

laden with the sense of recent backsliding? It may be some specific instance of unfaithfulness that it vexes us to think of; or it may be a certain general listlessness and languor and spiritual declension of which we have to complain. Let us affectionately ask one another, let us faithfully ask ourselves, Wherefore is it so? Is it the remembrance of particular occasions on which we are conscious that we have compromised our truth and integrity, dissembled our principles, connived at sin, or treated it lightly, or made a mock at it; failed, in trying circumstances, to testify for God; wounded tender consciences, or cast a stumbling-block in the way of anxious inquirers, or stifled awakenings in careless souls, by our inconsistency, our worldly conformity, our easy walk, our abuse of our Christian liberty;—is it any such remembrance that haunts us? Or is it, what is even more distressing,—a certain vague feeling of apathy, for which we can scarcely assign any tangible cause, that oppresses us, —a want of interest in sacred things,—a dreary drowsiness in poring over the word and drawing near to the throne of grace,—a kind of lethargy, in short, coldly stealing and insinuating itself through all our spiritual frame? Have we to confess that we are in the position of beaten men in Christ's warfare, or of men who have given way? And are we engaging in any holy service—coming, let us say, to the Lord's table—in something of the same spirit in which the Israelites sent for the Lord's ark,—expecting, somehow, to be the better for this sacrament being administered to us, as they imagined they would fight the better for that symbol being among them;

and determined, on the strength of this holy ordinance, to make a firmer stand in the next trial of our courage, and leave no inglorious buckler on the field? And yet, all the time we are not quite at ease,—we have our misgivings and alarms. The unanswered question, "Wherefore did the Lord smite us before the Philistines?" stands ominously out as a barrier against our complete enlargement, confidence, and security.

But why, let us ask again, why is it still an unanswered question? Why should it be an unanswered question any longer? Even now the Lord is ready to answer it. Even now he will search and try us. He will unfold to us the real cause of any controversy he has with us, or of any failures and defeats on our part, in our walking with him, and our warring for him. Have any of us been offering in earnest the prayer of the psalmist: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting?" And may not some of us truly say, that in a way we little thought of—by terrible things in righteousness—the Lord has been answering that prayer to us? Would that we were all made willing now, under the searching of his providence as well as of his word and Spirit—for he is searching us very sharply this day—to have the wound of our souls thoroughly probed, and not slightly healed; each man among us submitting the plague of his own heart to be dealt with—oh! how faithfully and yet how tenderly—by him who is the holy God, but who is also to us in Christ Jesus a reconciled and loving Father.

See, brother, he waiteth to be gracious. He has balm for every wound, blood for every sin, healing for every backsliding, and a gracious reception and free love for each and all, however miserable on account of the greatness of their guilt or the stony hardness of their heart, who, with all that great guilt and that hard heart, will only so far honour, and trust, and gratify him, as let him take the guilt away and turn the smitten rock within into a fountain of tears.

Thus repenting and doing our first works, returning anew to God, and embracing anew his promises of full and free reconciliation, by all means let us send for the ark; by all means let us come to the sacrament; it will do us good now. No matter for our past defeat,—we shall be more than conquerors now. And it will be no vain and idle shout of boasting that lifts us up, as if a chest of shittim-wood, or this covered table and these elements of bread and wine, could save us; but the deep and grateful consciousness of our having, not the seal and symbol only of God's presence, but God himself in very truth, in all the fulness of his redeeming love and all the power of his quickening Spirit, in us and among us;—this will so inspire a calm serenity, and humble, holy resolution, as to strike real, and it may be salutary, fear into the consciences of the enemies of the truth, and satisfy aged Eli, that, so far as this particular cause of anxiety is concerned, his heart need no more tremble for the ark of God.

Would to God that all of us individually, all the congregations of the Church, and our beloved Church her-

self, were thus brought low, that we might be exalted,—thus weakened, that we might be strengthened in the Lord! For who can shut his eyes to the fact, that even since the Lord began to deal with us, and with the Church, as in these last years he has been dealing, there has been too much of human boasting and human confidence,—too much noise and shouting? The high testimony which we have been honoured to bear for Christ, and the great things which he has done for us; the liberty and enlargement which he has granted to us, and the liberality and love which he has called forth among us; the approving voice of other Churches, and of all our missionaries in other lands; our door of access to the people at home; nay, even the partial droppings of the dew of the Holy Spirit on our assemblies and flocks; the prosperity of so many of our congregations; the very persecutions which have visited others;—all these things we have been too apt to regard very much as the Israelites regarded the arrival of the ark among them; we have exulted when our adversaries seemed to be startled and surprised; and we have congratulated one another, as if the warfare were accomplished and the victory were already ours.

Is it in rebuke of such untoward and untimely lifting up of our hearts, that the great Head of the Church is chastening us,—that symptoms of disorder are showing themselves here and there, and masters in Israel are cut down? May the Lord himself sanctify these troubles! Everywhere may clamour cease, and deeply may the question be pondered, and fairly may it be met in refer-

ence both to the past and the present: "Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us?" For, assuredly, until that great outstanding question be disposed of, as regards individuals, congregations, and the Church at large—whatever zeal there may be, whatever enthusiasm, whatever wise plans and bold doings—the heart of an aged and godly Eli cannot cease to tremble for the ark of God.*

Once more, in the third place, let us take yet another, and that the most favourable view of the parties in whose hands the ark has come to be placed.—Let us suppose them to be neither hypocrites and mere formalists on the one hand, nor backsliders and men of doubtful position on the other. Let them be men of truest conscience and tenderest walk before God in Christ. Still, compassed about as they are with manifold infirmities, and liable to err and stumble at every step they take,—how shall they carry the precious burden safe along the rough road, or across the channel of the stormy sea, or by the way of the howling wilderness, or through the rage and din of hostile crowds? For it is a delicate and tender, as well as a costly deposit that is committed to their charge, easily susceptible of injury,—apt to be soiled and tarnished if the dust of earth reach it, or the very wind of heaven be suffered to visit it too roughly.

The essential holiness of God,—do we rightly appre-

* This whole passage I have thought it best to leave as it was originally written, although its application is partly local and temporary, having reference to a time of private bereavement and public loss (April and May, 1845)—a time, moreover, when men's minds in the Church to which the author belongs were not a little exercised in the manner here indicated.

hend what it is? And have we any adequate impression of that holiness as imparted and communicated to whatever is his? The name, the word, the day, the house of the Lord,—whatsoever he vindicates and challenges to himself, not by the right of creation merely, but by that of redemption through the blood of his Son, and renewal through the operation of his Spirit; these things, that thus belong to God our Saviour—how venerable are they, and how awful! And it is these glories and wonders of his grace and power that he commits into our hands, to be defended and to be displayed.

Ah! my brother, if indeed you are a believer in Jesus, consider how much of what is God's you carry about with you wherever you go!—your body and your spirit, which are his,—your character and reputation, which are his,—your talents, which are his,—your very life, which is now altogether his! His honour, and the interests of his kingdom, are now bound up with everything you say and do. Not a plan or purpose you can form but must affect something that is his;—every hour you spend is a portion of his time,—every mite you cast into whatsoever treasury is his property!

For it is not with us now as it was with the Israelites of old. They might place the ark in comparative security in the midst of their close and compact ranks, where not a finger of the enemy could touch and pollute it, until all its defenders were slain. Man after man might be smitten, and phalanx after phalanx might be cut down or scattered to the winds; and though the danger, becoming more imminent every moment, might make the heart of

one who witnessed it tremble more and more, not a profane or unhallowed breath could sully the sacred symbol till its last guardians, the wretched Hophni and Phinehas, had fallen. But in the Christian army, what of God's is intrusted to men's care, is so diffused and circulated through all the troops, that not a tongue can speak, nor a limb move, nor the poorest soldier in the utmost extremity of the lines be wounded, or turn his back, or lay down his arms, without instant damage to the holy trust which is committed more or less to all. And how sensitive to the slightest shock is the holiness of all belonging to God that you have to handle and to bear about with you! The smallest rent mars that seamless coat, woven from the top throughout, which is the uniform of all Christ's volunteers,—the faintest stain shows itself on that clear bright name with which each forehead is sealed!

'Ah! who may venture to undertake such responsibility as this? Who is sufficient for these things? Let me never open my mouth for Christ, or lift my hand for Christ, or stir my foot for Christ, lest inadvertently I offend, and be found hindering instead of furthering the cause which I love,—blemishing instead of adorning the doctrine which I believe,—discrediting instead of magnifying the only name under heaven which I care to honour, because it is the only name under heaven given among men whereby I, or any sinner like me, can be saved.'

Nay, but, brother, inactivity, reserve, hanging back, will not mend your position. You have got your post assigned to you; and whether you decline to act at all, or act amiss, the jewel of Christ's crown which you have

in charge is in either way compromised. Nor have you any choice, or any liberty to stand aloof. Necessity is laid upon you. Woe is unto you if you preach not the gospel! Woe is unto you if you testify not for Christ! Woe is unto you if you speak not to your ungodly neighbour's conscience, and care not for his soul! Woe is unto you if you visit not the fatherless and widows in their affliction! Woe is unto you if you speak not a word in season to him that is weary! You have your task, your office, your ministry, allotted to you, whether as a public functionary or as a private member of the Church; and if you undertake it with fear,—if your heart trembles for the ark of God, which you feel yourself to be so incompetent to handle,—ask yourself, would either it or you be at all the safer were you to refuse to handle it at all?

Let me put myself now for an instant in the position of an onlooker or watcher, like the aged Eli; and what might be my thoughts, as I gaze, not on the faithless or the faltering part of the Lord's army, but on his true and earnest adherents?

Do I see any living for themselves alone,—caring for their own souls,—apparently finding food and refreshment in ordinances, and striving to have a close walk with God—while yet there is no sign of their taking any special interest in any department of the Lord's work, or charging themselves with any specific duty with reference to any one in particular of their fellow-sinners around them? I ask, if, with all their devout assiduity of personal and private piety, their souls are prospering and in health?

Ah! the complaint is, "My leanness, my leanness!" And when I consider the selfish, secluded, isolated, and indolent character of their devotions, I cease to wonder, I simply mourn; and, having a regard to those very spiritual interests of their own which they seem exclusively to care for,—more even than to the good cause which they are sinfully neglecting,—my heart trembles for the ark of God.

Do I see any who are keepers of the vineyards of others, and are not keeping their own; any spiritual busybodies in other men's matters, and idlers in their own; any who are tempted to put an officious and bustling energy in the Lord's work in the place of deep experimental searching of the Lord's word; any, in short, who find it easier to exhaust themselves for whole days in active service than to pass a still and silent hour in solitary prayer? Ah! I may cease to wonder that such incessant pains should issue in such scanty fruit; and, with special reference even to those public concerns which such persons seem to prefer to their own spiritual well-being, my desponding heart trembles for the ark of God.

Where, then, shall this trembling heart find rest? I pass in review before me the whole muster-roll of the tried and tested army of the Lord. I take the champions and captains one after another. I rely on the mature experience of many a hoary veteran. I hail the fresh ardour of many an eagle-eyed recruit. But as, one after another, they take up the seemingly desperate battle, and one after another give some melancholy advantage to the foe,—my heart still trembles for the ark of God. I cannot see a preacher, however gifted, ascend to his desk;

or a pastor, however faithful, visit his flock; or an elder, the most conscientious, go his rounds; or a deacon, the most punctual, perform his service; or any private member of the church draw near a sick-bed where an anxious soul is tossing, or enter a parlour where a word in season may be spoken, and a clear testimony may be borne;—but my heart must tremble for the ark of God. And all the while my heart must tremble the more, because the parties who are the occasions of its trembling seem themselves to tremble so very little. For if the Israelites in the camp had trembled more for the ark of God, Eli's heart, as he sat by the wayside watching, might have trembled less.

IV.

ELI—A GODLY MAN TREMBLING FOR THE ARK OF GOD.

"His heart trembled for the ark of God."—1 SAMUEL iv. 13.

PART THIRD.

THE composition of the army to whom the ark of God is committed, may but too well account for the trembling of an Eli's heart. Not to speak of the false and formal adherents to the cause,—how feeble and faint-hearted are many of the host,—how ill at ease,—how unbelieving! And even the best and bravest are compassed about with infirmity; and the holiest fall far short of any adequate apprehension of what it is to serve the holy God, and uphold the honour of his holy name. It is a gloomy picture we have been contemplating. May there be no representation given somewhat less discouraging, to relieve the gloom ere we pass from this first cause of the trembling of Eli's heart? Let us try. Let us ask if no company or army of men may be got together, to whom Eli could see the ark of God committed without his heart trembling,—at least so very anxiously? The three sketches we have attempted to give, being reversed, may suggest the reply, and furnish the materials of a more trustworthy host. Let us summon our troops.

In the first place, let them all be men who come, not

as fancying that the Lord hath need of them, but as feeling that they have need of Him. This is our primary and capital qualification. We are to have no self-righteous, self-confident cavaliers, who would either hire themselves to Christ for a reward, or espouse his cause with an air of condescending patronage, as if they were doing him a favour. But is there any poor sinner in all the world who looks upon himself as lost, and so far from imagining that he could ever lend a helping hand in an emergency, considers himself the very Jonah, that, if taken on board, would sink the ship—the worse than Achan, that, if admitted into the camp, would only mar the fight? Come, O sinner! whosoever thou art, with nothing but thy wants for Christ to supply—thy sins for Christ to forgive—thy diseases for Christ to heal—thy hard heart for Christ to break;—come, thou art the very man for whom Christ is looking out. It was to enlist thee that he came into the world; it was to save thee that he suffered and died. Come; and at thy coming, though thou bringest nothing but guilt and sorrow, wounds and bruises and putrefying sores,—Eli's heart will not tremble for the ark of God.

Secondly, let all who flock to the Lord's standard at first, or continue to rally round it, make sure and thorough work of the settlement of their covenant with the Lord himself. Let there be nothing ambiguous or equivocal, nothing uncertain or precarious, as respects the footing on which you are to be with him. And if any cause of misunderstanding has arisen—if any defeat has been sustained while he withdrew his presence on account of your sin—

think not to patch up a truce or accommodation with him, or to recover his favour and his powerful aid, by having recourse to half measures or formal devices. Come again, at once, to himself;—let there be an entire clearing up of all that is amiss between him and you. On his part there is no hesitation or reserve; he would have a perfect covenant of peace established. No measured or doubtful boon does he dispense; but, taking you once more to be his own, he would have you to be again, and for ever, complete in him. Let him have your consent to be so. Let his Spirit incline you to submit thoroughly to him,—to his searching of your painful wounds,—to his tender upbinding of them all. Be satisfied with no noisy shout of triumph, upon any merely external and temporary sign of his presence. Be satisfied with nothing short of an uncompromising adjustment of the question, why has he been smiting you? Then, all being clear and bright,—his Spirit abiding in you and his countenance shining upon you,—when he now commits himself to you, and commits you again to himself, frankly and freely, without condition on his part and without guile on yours, there will be no occasion for Eli's heart to tremble for the ark of God.

Finally, let all in this army recognise and feel their responsibility,—the peculiar sacredness of the trust committed to them, and its extreme liability to receive damage in their hands. Let them know what it is to work out their own salvation, and to aim at the salvation of others. Let them have a due sense of the tenderness of the heavenly vessel which they bear, and the holiness

of the heavenly name by which they are called. Then, though their infirmities may be many, and they may often feel themselves to be in straits, let them be assured that it is not on their account that Eli's heart will tremble for the ark of God.

You may be hesitating even now, my brother, and shrinking from an explicit and open avowal of your faith, or from the undertaking of some labour of love to which you feel yourself called or prompted. 'Ah!' you may be saying within yourself, 'I would gladly receive the seal and pledge of my living union to Christ, and have him committed to be mine, and myself committed to be his. And I would esteem it a precious privilege and high honour to have a hand in some personal ministry for the glory of his name, and the winning of souls to him. Had I any good reason to hope that I would not dishonour my profession, or do harm instead of good in any work I might undertake, oh! how cordially would I take my place at his table, and enrol myself among those whose whole aim in life it is to be ever doing something for Christ, for perishing sinners, for poor sufferers. But I feel that it is a much more solemn thing than many think—or than I once thought myself—to take the name of God into my lips, and have the vows of the Lord upon me. I would not rush into such a position so hastily as many do, nor carry its tremendous responsibilities so lightly.'

You do not err, brother, in your estimate of the solemnity of the Christian calling. You cannot form too high a conception of the delicacy, and unsullied purity

and integrity beyond suspicion, that ought to characterize the follower of Jesus; the light that should ever kindle in his eye, the love that should ever burn in his heart, the grace that should be poured into his lips, the comely beauty that should shed a charm over his whole demeanour, and the high authority that should give weight to his counsels, his example, his rebuke. But what then? Do you on that account hesitate, and halt, and hang back, when the Lord is calling you? Are you deterred, by the very loftiness of the standard which you have set up, from casting in your lot with the Lord's host, and do you think it safer for yourself, and better on the whole for the cause, that you should not be so deeply pledged to a style of life which you might not realize, and that the holy name should not be taken into the keeping of one who might only tarnish and soil it? Nay, brother, suffer the word of expostulation. Assuming your scruples to be real, and not affected, let me say to you, first, You have no right thus to reason; you cannot thus evade the responsibility which you would decline. It is laid on you by Christ, and it is treachery or cowardice, or both, to shrink from it. Accept it, rather, cheerfully, manfully, in faith; you have his own assurance: "My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." And let me also say to you, further, It is precisely you, and such as you, that the Lord seeks to serve him; you who have some adequate notion of the sacredness of the Christian profession, and the magnitude of the Christian enterprise—your irresistible call to undertake both, and your utter and helpless insufficiency

for either. The Father seeketh such to worship him; the Son seeketh such to commit himself to them; the Spirit seeketh and searcheth such to dwell in them;—that they may "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God that worketh in them both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Ay, and their fear and trembling will go far to supersede all Eli's trembling for the ark of God.

"Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."—"Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build me? and where is the place of my rest? For all these things hath mine hand made, and all these things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."—"Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel: I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel."

It was not a trembling, but a presumptuous look into the ark, that slew the men of Bethshemesh. It was not a trembling, but a presumptuous hand that Uzzah laid

upon the ark, when for that error he was smitten. It was not a trembling, but a presumptuous shout around the ark in the camp that made the old man's heart tremble as he sat watching. Look ye on the ark—touch ye the ark—rejoice ye in the ark, under the profound impression of this awful inquiry: "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God? Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us?" Let there be such trembling as this in your hearts when you handle the ark of God, and at last the trembling of Eli's heart may cease.

II. Besides the composition of the army into whose hands the ark may have come, the occasions and circumstances which seem to bring it forward in battle, and to peril it on the issue of battle, may cause not a little trembling of heart for its safety. We might here speak of such occasions as that on which the Israelites sustained a miserable defeat at the hands of the Amalekites and Canaanites, when they would have taken the ark with them in their unwarranted enterprise, had not Moses sternly refused to let it go out of the camp (Numb. xiv. 40-45). There is not always at hand a Moses to keep the ark from being involved in the hazards of a presumptuous enterprise, undertaken in the impatience of unbelief, by men smarting under the Lord's rebuke, and in haste to retrieve a false or sinful step. An Eli may be unable in such circumstances, to arrest the hot impetuosity of the irritated host,—his heart can but tremble for the ark of God.

"Woe is me," said the royal psalmist, whom superficial

critics would pronounce, with cursing Shimei, to have been a man delighting only in blood; "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar! My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war." How weary was David of wars and fightings when he cried out, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest!" Nor was it for his own sake alone that he yearned for this quietness;—he desired to see the ark of God, so long tossed on the unsettled flood, at last lodged in safety on the holy mountain. And for the sincerity and intensity of this desire, he could appeal to God himself: "Lord, remember David, and all his afflictions: how he sware unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob; Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob" (Ps. cxxxii. 1-5). But it was not given to him to accomplish this fondest wish of his heart. It was reserved for Solomon to build for God an house. All David's lifetime, the symbol of the covenant, unsettled and unhoused, was constantly exposed to peril and profanation, amid the vicissitudes of his stormy career;—whether lodged with Abinadab at Gibeah, or carried aside into the house of Obed-edom, or covered with a tent on Zion; whether "heard of at Ephratah," or "found in the fields of the wood" (Ps. cxxxii. 6). All his lifetime, therefore, considering these manifold exposures, David's heart, like Eli's, might tremble for the ark of God.

It is the prayer of every true servant and soldier of the Lord, that the din of war and controversy may speedily come to an end, and the Church may dwell safely in a quiet habitation. The world, indeed, is apt to judge otherwise of those who maintain the Lord's cause, especially in troublous times, stigmatizing them as troublesome and pestilent sowers of sedition, or as lovers of strife, seeking to turn the world upside down. There may be those amongst the ranks of Christ's army who delight in contest for its own sake, and are, as it were, in their element when the storm is at its height; and they who witness only the untiring energy and unflinching courage of such devoted men, may conceive of them as having no pleasure in any scene but one of stirring incident and adventure, of peril and of death. But could we read their hearts as God does,—ah! we would soon see what injustice the world does them. Not willingly, but because necessity is laid on them, do they engage in such scenes; and amid all their bold and hearty animation when the war is raging, what secret sighs are breathed for the return of a serene and honourable peace! Could it be effected without compromising the cause of truth and righteousness, how gladly,—whether on the field of theological controversy, or of ecclesiastical contention, or of those political struggles in which the interests of Christ's kingdom are mixed up,—how gladly would we proclaim a cessation of hostilities, a truce, an armistice, a pause, that the ark of God might have a little rest!

"O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself into thy scabbard; rest

and be still. How can it be quiet, seeing the Lord hath given it a charge against Askelon, and against the sea-shore? There hath he appointed it," (Jer. xlvii. 6, 7).

Quiet! rest! how can it be? Satan is not bound; the world still lieth in wickedness; heresies, divisions, strifes, abound; Babylon is not yet fallen. Nay, if ever there was a time when rest and quiet might appear indefinitely remote—when the sacred symbol might be regarded as but a speck like the halcyon bird, or that Noetic ship dimly seen amid the chaos of the wild and tumultuous waters—it is this present age, this present hour, in which, as it would seem, old controversies and new, old causes of agitation and new outbreaks, are about to be blended in one general hurricane and fiery storm. What former dispute, in literature, theology, or politics, is not revived? What fixed foundation of opinion, in any department of human thought, is not now unsettled? What body of men is in security and at ease? What creed, or covenant, or combination, is giving compactness to the gathering masses, whether of the higher intellectual and spiritual orders, or of the grosser portions of mankind? Statesmen and people, priest and flock—all alike are thrown back on first principles if they have any, or on mere hour-glass expediency if they have none. And seeing how things most sacred are now at issue on the field of strife, and how much risk there is, in such stirring times, of the kindling of that wrath of man which worketh not the righteousness of God, as well as the scheming of that wisdom of man which is foolishness with God,—how shall not Eli's heart tremble for the ark of God!

Is there, then, no source of consolation in the prospect of such trials and commotions as these?

Had any one sought to comfort the blind old man, as he sat upon a seat by the wayside watching, and to allay the agitation of his soul—he might have been reminded that what his heart trembled for was the ark of God; that God himself, therefore, might be expected to care for it; and that for him to be so anxious concerning it, was almost like distrusting God. Or it might have been represented to him, that for any evil consequences ensuing from the ill-advised policy on the part of the elders and people that put the ark in peril, he at least could not be held personally responsible. The whole of these proceedings were against his judgment and remonstrances; and be the issue what it may, his conscience at all events must be clear, and his hands must be clean.

Would these considerations materially alleviate his grief?

The last of them, so far from taking in as comfort, he might almost have resented as an insult. What! was he thinking only of himself, and of his own individual credit or security, when his heart trembled for the ark of God? There may be men who, in such circumstances, would rather congratulate themselves on their own exemption from blame, than enter into the risk and danger of the good cause and of its soldiers. From the safe shore they pleasantly view the toil of the exhausted crew, whose bark is all but engulfed in the billows; all the while complacently taking credit to themselves for having wisely declined to embark, and having warned their rash com-

rades of the impending storm. These are they who are so selfish, even in the Lord's work, that they can rejoice in no success that is not won by themselves, and grieve over no failure for which they cannot be brought in as personally accountable. Not such was Eli. That selfish ground of congratulation is not one that he can stand on.

The other topic, indeed, is more congenial; it is comfort which he can take in. He calls to mind, that great as is the peril to which it is exposed, and weak and unworthy as are the hands that bear or defend it, it is the ark of God still; and, remembering this, he bids his trembling heart be calm.

Still it costs him an effort to say, when things seem to be at the worst, "I will trust, and not be afraid." It is impossible for him to disconnect himself from the battle that is raging: nor can even the assurance of the ark's ultimate safety and triumph make him insensible in the meantime to the rude shocks that assail it, and the perils it has to encounter alike from friends and from foes.

I cannot help becoming indignant and uneasy when a father's good name is aspersed, or his good faith is called in question, even though I know that he will certainly clear himself at last. No more can I look on with calm indifference, when I see the good cause injured by human pride, and prejudice, and passion, even though I firmly believe that it will ere long come off victorious. If I love God, I feel for the honour and safety of his ark with that nice sense of honour which would make the sword leap from its scabbard when the faintest whisper

is breathed, or the puniest arm is raised, to its disparagement or injury.

But, alas! I know not what spirit I am of, when I would call fire from heaven on the heads of those who will not give it homage, or when I would use the fire of earth to minister in its service. Let me be still and know that it is the ark of God. And while engaged in the strife, let me beware of all that, if I were but a looker-on or a looker-out, would make my heart tremble for the ark of God. Then only may I say with Moses, when the ark sets forward: "Arise, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee." And when it rests—oh that it might be soon!—how gladly will I join in the triumphant and peaceful strain: "Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel" (Numbers x. 35, 36).

V.

THE LONG-SUFFERING OF GOD.

EXAMPLE IN THE CASE OF AN IMPENITENT SINNER—CHARACTER OF AHAB.

1 KINGS xxii.

THE narrative in this chapter brings prominently out two very different characters—that of Ahab, king of Israel, and that of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. We begin with the consideration of Ahab's character, as it is illustrated in the closing scene of his life.

This Ahab had been all along in his life, as he continued to be in his death, a signal monument and example of the long-suffering patience of God. In the very beginning of his reign he had provoked the Lord by a new crime. He did evil, it is said, in the sight of the Lord, above all that were before him; and, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, he took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal and worshipped him (1 Kings xvi. 30).

The sin of Jeroboam was not so much idolatry as schism—not the worship of false gods, but the worship of the true God in a false, unauthorized, and divisive course. After the revolt of the ten tribes, he saw that their political separation from Judah would be of short

duration if they still went up to Jerusalem to worship; whereupon, taking counsel (1 Kings xii. 28), he set up in Dan and Bethel two golden calves, in imitation of the cherubic emblems in the temple, and as substitutes for them; and, ordaining a separate priesthood to minister at these new shrines, he made the people believe that they need not go out of their own possessions to find the God who had brought them out of Egypt. This was the policy of Jeroboam and his successors, to make the ten tribes independent of Jerusalem in things sacred as well as in things civil, by erecting separate altars, as well as a separate throne. Still they did not profess to differ in the object of their worship from their brethren of the two tribes, who continued subject to the house of David.

But Ahab improved upon this device; he completed the separation, and consummated the apostasy. Having married, against the law, a heathen princess, he openly adopted the heathen worship. The daughter of the king of Zidon easily introduced and established the Zidonian idolatry, the worship of Baalim, or the heavenly hosts. This fierce and persecuting idolatry well-nigh suppressed the religion of Jehovah, and exterminated his prophets. A small but chosen band, however, of these devoted men escaped the fury of Ahab and Jezebel; and in this depth of wickedness, when the Levites were expelled, the priesthood degraded, and the people sunk in crime, boldly maintained the cause of God.

Among these, Elijah was the chief. On the very first outbreaking of Ahab's new offence, he was commissioned to announce one of the judgments threatened by Moses,

that of long drought. A parched land and a famished population wrought at last a salutary change. Elijah, miraculously preserved during the famine, appears suddenly before the king, challenges the priests of Baal to a trial of their respective faiths, and having confounded them and vindicated himself by the fire from heaven descending on his altar, brings back the prince and people to the acknowledgment of the true God. The heathen priests and prophets are slain. Those of Jehovah are sought out and honoured, (1 Kings xvii. and xviii.)

It was in this interval of partial and transient reformation that Ahab, by divine encouragement, defeated the king of Syria, and repelled his invasion. But in the very height of triumph he forgot God, and made a covenant with the enemy, whom he was commanded utterly to destroy; suffering him to escape on his promising to restore a few towns formerly taken from the Israelites. He had victory given to him, and final deliverance secured, if only he had been willing, in faith, to follow up and follow out the advantage he had gained, and, according to God's command, utterly exterminate the foe. But he would be wiser—more politic or more pitiful—than God. He would make terms of compromise, drive a profitable bargain, and, in consideration of a merely nominal and apparent concession—for the Syrian king soon showed he was not in earnest—let the oppressor go in peace. For this he was rebuked by one of the prophets: "Thus saith the Lord, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and

thy people for his people." The rebuke, instead of humbling, irritated and provoked him: "He went to his house heavy and displeased," (1 Kings xx.)

Soon he was still farther misled by that covetousness which in his case most emphatically was idolatry. The longing eye which he cast on Naboth's vineyard seduced him into compliance with his wife's diabolical counsel to have Naboth stoned to death on a false charge of blasphemy; and that unscrupulous and unprincipled woman having regained her influence over him, soon hurried him again into the worst excesses of his former heathenism; insomuch that "there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up; and he did very abominably in following idols," (1 Kings xxi.)

But still he is not forsaken by God. In the very instant of his relapse into sin, the prophet Elijah is sent to admonish him. Ahab repents; not perhaps very thoroughly, or with a really godly sorrow, but still so as to procure for himself one more respite, one other trial. For it is a striking feature of the providence of God, as exemplified in Scripture, that he sometimes accepts even a hypocritical, or at least a temporary and superficial, reformation, so far as to make it the occasion of a new respite and a new trial;—but it may be the final respite, the final trial, as it was in the case of Ahab (1 Kings xxi. 17-29).

Let us pause, however, here for a moment, and behold thus far, and at this stage, the goodness of God. In an age and nation of abounding iniquity, he has all along

been raising up witnesses of his truth and his love. And in the particular case of Ahab, how patiently has he waited! It seems as if he were willing to make all possible allowance for the man's natural infirmity, his impetuosity of temper, the circumstances in which he has been placed, and the influences exerted over him. He is reluctant to give him up altogether. He labours to arrest his downward career; he hails and welcomes every appearance of improvement; he counteracts the advice of evil counsellors by the faithful and effectual expostulations of true prophets;—he is long-suffering and slow to anger.

But there is a period to this forbearance. The time is come when Ahab's fate must be decided. We arrive at the history of Ahab's fall,—the last controversy between the goodness of God on the one hand, and the wilfulness of this heady and high-minded man on the other.

Let us mark the successive stages of this strife:—the king's wilful purpose; the Lord's gracious opposition; the issue of the contest;—the issue and end of all.

PART FIRST.—*The King's Wilful Purpose* (1 Kings xxii. 1-6).

Ahab's purpose is announced in the beginning of the chapter. We find him, after three years of peace, preparing to attack the Syrians. The Syrian king, whom Ahab had treated with such ill-timed lenity, and with whom he had made so sinful a compromise, has, as might have been anticipated, failed to fulfil the stipulated terms of ransom, and to restore the cities of Israel. Ahab, provoked at his own simplicity in having suffered so favour-

able an opportunity to slip, through his fond trust in the honour of a perfidious prince, and stung by the recollection of the prophet's rebuke, conceives the design of retrieving his error, and compelling the fulfilment of the treaty, on the faith of which he had been weakly persuaded to liberate the enemy whom God had doomed. In this, Ahab acts under the impulse of resentment and ambition. He burns with the desire of avenging a personal wrong and insult, rather than of fulfilling the decree of God. Had he consulted the will of God, he must have seen and felt that it was now too late for him to take the step proposed. He had let the time go past. When God gave him victory, and assured him of power over his enemy, then he should have used his opportunity. This he had failed to do; and for his failure he had been reproved by God, and warned by the prophet that his people and his life were forfeited. He might have acquiesced in the reproof, and learned caution from the warning; and, thankful for the undeserved blessings of peace and safety which he enjoyed, he might have waited patiently on the Lord, who, in his own good time and way, would have accomplished his purpose. This would have been his true wisdom; and the best, or rather the only proof which he could give of the sincerity of his repentance, would have been to show himself thus humbled instead of being displeased. Certainly Ahab should have been the very last person to think of rousing and provoking the very foe who, by the divine sentence and by his own compromise, had gained so sad and signal an advantage over him.

But instead of following so wise a course, Ahab blindly

rushes into the opposite extreme from his former fault; and because before he has been blamed for not going far enough, with God on his side, he is provoked to go too far now, though God has declared against him. His conduct was like that of the Israelites of old, who, discouraged by the report of the spies, refused to invade the land, even when assured of God's help; but when God refused his help on account of their unbelief, instead of humbly receiving the just punishment of their offence, were stung by it to the madness of making the rash attempt themselves. So Ahab, instead of meekly submitting to the displeasure of God for his late unjustifiable weakness, would brave that displeasure again by an act of equally unjustifiable rashness;—in the very temper of a petted and froward child, who, when reproved for doing too little, thinks to show his spirit by instantly doing too much.

Still, however, though in breaking the peace or truce with which he is favoured, and venturing to provoke his perfidious and powerful neighbour, Ahab is acting without the warrant, nay, against the express warning of the Lord, he is not without his reasons, and they are very plausible reasons, to justify the step proposed.

In the first place, it is in itself an act of patriotism and of piety; at least it looks very like it, and may easily be so represented: "And the king of Israel said unto his servants, Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria?" (ver. 3.) The city unquestionably belonged originally to Israel, and the king of Syria had promised

to restore it, along with his other conquests. It lay within the territory of the tribe of Gad. It was a city of the Levites, and a city of refuge. It was a possession, therefore, an important and indeed sacred possession of the Israelites. What harm, then, is Ahab doing? where is the injustice of his proceedings? Nay, is it not fair, reasonable, honourable, to attempt the recovery of his own and his people's rights? Is he not even consulting the honour of God, in seeking thus zealously the restoration of what is God's? Justice, duty, religion, appear to sanction his purpose.

Secondly, it has received the countenance of a friend: "And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramoth-gilead? And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses" (ver. 4). And that friend is not a wicked man, but one fearing God, and acknowledged by God as righteous.

And, thirdly, it has obtained the sanction of four hundred prophets: "Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king" (ver. 6). And these are not prophets of Baal; for his prophets had been lately dishonoured and almost utterly destroyed, and Ahab could not venture to bring any of them forward before so pious a prince as Jehoshaphat. Ahab is at this time professing a regard to the true religion, and he keeps at his court and about his person many disciples of the schools of the

prophets, who themselves hold, or are reputed to hold, the prophetic character. The most complaisant and courteous of their number would doubtless be his counsellors: the boldest, as we know, he imprisoned. Still the approbation of these four hundred prophets, such as they were, might well confirm his resolution.

Looking, then, at the act itself as an act of patriotic and pious zeal, encouraged by the consent of his friend and the concurrence of the prophets, Ahab, we may think, might well be misled. And we might pity and excuse him too, as one misled, did we not see him so willing to be so. Is he not all the while deceiving himself, and that too almost wilfully and consciously? Is it not the fact—does he not feel it in his secret soul to be the fact—that it is no sincere regard to the honour of his God and the good of his people that actuates him, but pride, vain-glory, ambition, and a spirit of impatience under the Lord's rebuke? Is he not aware, that in the enterprise which he contemplates he has no call from Heaven, and no right to reckon on help from on high?—that instead of having any title now to attack his enemy and to recover his lost possession, he should be very grateful if he is not himself attacked, his own life and his people's being declared to be forfeited? Then as to his friend's consent, has he dealt fairly with that friend? Has he stated to him all the circumstances of the case? And does he not see plainly his friend's desire to conciliate, or fear to offend? Is he not deliberately taking advantage of a good man's weakness? Lastly, as to the prophets, has he no cause to suspect flattery and falsehood? Is he not of free choice

preferring their soothing lie to the honest truth? Does he not know that there is one prophet at least whom he cannot venture to consult? And is not this of itself a proof that he is by no means himself satisfied that he is right; that, on the contrary, he feels or fears that he may be doing wrong?

O beware, ye pilgrims in an evil world, ye soldiers in an arduous fight, beware of your own rash wilfulness, of the weakness of compliant friends, and of the flattering counsels of evil men and seducers, who in the last times—in the last and critical stage of individual experience, as well as of the world's history—are sure to wax worse and worse! There is no design, no device, no desire of your hearts, which you may not find some specious arguments to justify, some friends to countenance, ay, and some prophets too to sanction. You scarcely ever can be tempted to take a single doubtful or dangerous step in life without having some plea of reason or religion to warrant it. It may be a step which God does not require you to take, and which he does not promise to assist you in taking. You may be putting in jeopardy your principles, and risking the very safety of your souls, by rushing needlessly and unwarrantably into the province of the enemy, and braving, or even courting, temptation—challenging, by invasion of its haunts, the seductions of an evil world—provoking the slumbering power of sin, of the very sin to which, by former concessions and compromises, you have given a formidable advantage over you. Ah! but you have some good purpose to serve in thus exposing yourselves—you have some important end to gain. You have to make up for past neglect;

you have to repair past errors; you have to win back to God some part of what the great adversary has conquered, which still you think might be cleansed and sanctified again; you have to assert your Christian freedom and vindicate your superiority over the world, the devil, and the flesh. And if you should go a step too far, and venture somewhat imprudently into the very midst of the strongholds of this world's god, you will surely, in consideration of the sincerity of your motives, be forgiven and protected. And then you can get good men, in their complaisance, to go along with you, and even some form, or feeling, or fashion of religion—some spiritual plea of gospel liberty or love—to consecrate the undertaking; and you may seem to have a very good cause, or at least a very fair excuse, for venturing, as you do, on the very margin of what is wrong.

Ay, but are you sure that, all this while, there is no guile in your spirit? Is there no consciousness of a selfish aim,—no feeling that, in part at least, you are seeking to gratify your own pride and passion, as well as to advance the interests of righteousness, when, not content with the security and peace which by God's special mercy you might enjoy, through simply believing in Jesus, hiding yourselves in him, and humbly keeping aloof from the evil one, you are thus ready to risk a nearer encounter with the foe, and trust in your own ability to conquer? Are you not deceiving yourselves, and willing to be deceived? Is there no pious friend, to win whose approval you feel that you would need to state your case falsely, or partially? Is there no sound judgment that you fear to

consult? no eye of searching penetration and keen reproof to which you would not wish the whole purpose of your hearts to be unveiled? no argument or expostulation to which you would not like to listen?—no prophet of the Lord whom you dare not send for?

Oh, if there be, let this proof of a bad, or a doubtful cause, startle and alarm you! Doubt, deliberate no more, if you would not be lost. However innocent, however justifiable, the line of conduct in question may be, however plausible the arguments in its favour, however ready the consent of friends, however full the sanction of prophets,—be sure it is the beginning of evil, the first step to ruin, as it was in the case of Ahab.

PART SECOND.—*The Lord's Gracious Opposition* (1 Kings xxii. 7-23.)

We come now to consider the Lord's opposition to Ahab's purpose; for God did not yet leave this infatuated man to himself—he interposed to warn him by the mouth of a faithful servant.

The king of Israel is satisfied with the oracular answer of the prophets. Not so, however, the king of Judah. He suspects something wrong, missing probably among the four hundred some one of whom he has heard. Hence his question (ver. 7), "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might enquire of him?" And hence the pains he takes to overcome Ahab's prejudice against Micaiah (ver. 8): "And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may enquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concern-

ing me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so." The king of Judah, it is true, does not venture to speak very boldly; for that he is too timid, or too temporizing. Still he persuades Ahab, and so far prevails as to have Micaiah summoned from the prison in which, for his freedom of speech, he had been confined: "Then the king of Israel called an officer, and said, Hasten hither Micaiah the son of Imlah."

This Micaiah is supposed to be the prophet who reproved Ahab formerly, on the occasion of his compromise with the Syrian king; and it was probably his boldness on that occasion that caused him to be imprisoned. That for some such reason he was at this time a prisoner, seems to be plainly implied, both in the king's manner of summoning him and in the terms in which he is afterwards remanded to confinement (ver. 26, 27). To please, then, his over-scrupulous ally, Ahab calls Micaiah into his counsels. But mark in what spirit he does so; not willingly, but reluctantly; not out of a candid desire to hear him, but with a fixed prejudice and predetermination against him.

And is not this the spirit in which good advice is too often asked, and the word of God consulted,—when it is too late,—when a man's mind is already all but made up? You go when your conscience will not otherwise let you alone, or when the remonstrances of pious friends trouble you; you go to some man of God, to God himself, by prayer and the searching of his word:—for what? what is it that you want?—light for duty, however self-denying? or light to justify your doubtful course? Alas!

alas! it may be all a mere form, gone through to satisfy some scruple of a friend; or it may be a desperate effort to catch at any semblance of divine permission for what you have, at any rate, set your heart on doing.

Look at Ahab, for example. See how he is occupied while his messenger is gone for Micaiah. Instead of preparing himself to judge impartially, he is still lending an itching ear to the prophets of smooth things, one of whom goes so far as to mock and mimic the symbolic mode of prophecy adopted by the true prophets, and to represent, by the similitude of two pushing horns, the supposed successes of the allied kings: "And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, having put on their robes, in a void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them. And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made him horns of iron: and he said, Thus saith the Lord, With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them. And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the king's hand" (ver. 10-12). Thus Ahab is confirmed in his purpose, and is still further prejudiced against Micaiah.

Meantime that man of God is called. He is advised, in friendship perhaps, to accommodate himself to the humour of the king, and to fall in with the rest of the prophets (ver. 13): "And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the

word of one of them, and speak that which is good." His answer is noble (ver. 14): "As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak." And right nobly does he redeem his pledge.

He stands before the princes, undaunted by their royal state. First of all, he rebukes the prejudice of Ahab, by seeming to flatter it (ver. 15): "So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king." He says this in bitter irony and sarcasm, taunting the king, and using the very words of the prophets to whom he delighted to listen. 'What is the use of consulting me? They have given you already the advice and the promise which you desire. Doubtless they are to be believed, and you have resolved to believe them. They bid you go;—yes! go by all means. They assure you of success; certainly they must know best.'

The irony conveys a cutting reproof, and a merited one; and with this the holy prophet might have left the prince to believe his own and his flatterers' lie.

But the mercy of God and the sin of Ahab are to be yet more signally brought out. Micaiah, therefore, when again adjured, speaks plainly. Ahab discerns the sharp and keen ridicule of the prophet's first address, and feels the rebuke. He presses him more closely: "How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?" (ver. 16.) In reply, the prophet first describes what he saw in vision,

—a scene of desolation,—the king lost, and the people dispersed,—the shepherd smitten, and the sheep scattered;—an expression which became proverbial, and was prophetic of another scene, when another Shepherd was smitten: "And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the Lord said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace" (ver. 17). And then, still more thoroughly to awaken and alarm the king, the prophet, by a striking announcement of what is presented to him in vision as at that moment passing in the unseen world, denounces the falsehood of the other advisers, and unveils to Ahab the crisis of his fate: "And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee" (ver. 19-23).

Thus Micaiah describes the Lord sitting on the throne of judgment, and in judgment sending forth a spirit of delusion to lure and decoy Ahab to his fall: not that God

ever seeks and desires the destruction of his creatures, or influences them by any necessity to be destroyed; but that, both as the natural consequence and also as the just punishment of their perverseness, when he sees them, in spite of all remonstrances, enamoured of destruction, he suffers them to destroy themselves. He leaves them, when willing to be deceived, at the mercy of the great deceiver. He causes blindness to fall on those who will not see, and hardness of heart on those who will not believe; and when men are ready to grasp a lie, sends lying spirit to put a lie in their right hands.

And yet even to the last, in judgment God remembers mercy. The very scene of judgment which the prophet discloses does not imply any fixed and irrevocable design of wrath against Ahab;—with such a design, indeed, the disclosure of the scene would be incompatible and inconsistent. We speak of the revealed, not the secret will of God; with the revealed will of God alone Ahab had to do. And accordingly this scene, while it indicates a fearful trial, appointed in just wrath—God himself sending forth a lying spirit—indicates also, in the very intimation given of it previously by one whom Ahab knew he ought to believe as a true prophet, that the Lord would have him to be forewarned and forearmed. He thus puts into Ahab's hands, if he will but take them, the arms by which he may meet the adversary;—the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; and the shield of faith, whereby he may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. It is in love that this scene is disclosed—in truest and most tender pity—to rouse, to

arrest, to turn him, ere it is too late. There is yet time for him to stop short; else why this last attempt to open his eyes?

And is it not ever thus? The sentence of final infatuation does not come without previous intimation. However you may be deceived, or may be deceiving yourselves, is there not a voice of truth, or a prophetic warning, which you feel might keep you right—if you were but willing to be kept right? Lying spirits of Satan may be sent abroad; but is not the Spirit of the living God still to the last striving with you? Though all your friends, and all the prophets, and all the longings of your own heart, join to beguile you, is there not still something in your conscience, in the Bible, in the providence of God, which tells you that all is not well, and bids you pause and see how Satan is mustering his agents to betray you, and God is permitting or appointing it, on account of your sin? And is not this the very height of your criminality and the aggravation of your doom, that, with your eyes opened, and suspicions and doubts awakened,—when, by the misgivings and forebodings of your own souls, as well as by signs all around you, God is in mercy calling you to beware of the fearful visitation of judicial blindness and a reprobate mind, soon to be inflicted on such as you are,—you can still listen to the soothing voice which speaks according to your wish, and count the faithful monitor your enemy because he tells you the truth?

So it was with Ahab. "Did I not tell thee," he says to his ally, that this Micaiah was mine enemy,—"that

he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?" (ver. 18.) 'You see what I gain by consulting so severe and gloomy a fanatic. But, after all, why should he arrest our glorious career of triumph? What need have we of his sanction? Have we not enough of countenance without him? What fault have you to find with the four hundred, who have all with one consent promised us victory? And then see how tame and mean-spirited this saint is,—how meekly he submits to insult and affront: "But Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near, and smote Micaiah on the cheek, and said, Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee?" (ver. 24.) When he is buffeted, he takes it patiently. Is he a fit counsellor of brave men and potent kings? Is his sour and malignant envy, grudging our success,—his morose and unaccommodating temper, crossing our purposes,—thus always to blast our fair prospects with the ominous presage of woe? No; his very presence spreads cowardice and disaffection. Let him leave war and government to nobler spirits; away with him to his dungeon and his cell, to meditate his tame doctrine of slavery and peace, and muse on the glories of his visionary heaven.'

The prophet, having faithfully discharged his conscience, and served his God and his king, retires happy to his prison, calm and confident of the result: "And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself. And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to

Joash the king's son; and say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace. And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you" (ver. 25-28).

The prince, enraged and irritated by the consciousness of this last wrong, having sealed his doom by his abuse of this last mercy, losing now all temper and self-command, rushes infatuated to battle and to death: "So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead" (ver. 29).

PART THIRD.—*The Issue of the Contest* (1 Kings xxii. 29-38).

We come now to the closing scene, the issue of Ahab's trial. Having at last overmastered the scruples of his friend, Ahab marshals the hosts of Israel and Judah to go up against Ramoth-gilead.

And here, in the first place, let the expedient by which Ahab consults his own safety be observed. For he does not feel entirely comfortable and secure; he cannot rid himself of the uneasy apprehension which the prophet's word has suggested. There is danger. O but he will fall on a shrewd way of escaping it! The prophet has announced that it is the shepherd, that is the king, who is to fall; and accordingly, as it turns out, the orders of the Syrian commander are (ver. 31), that his troops are to spare all meaner enemies, and bend their whole force against the royal captain of the Jewish host. Ahab, knowing the hazard, cunningly proposes to resign the

post of honour to his ally: "And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and enter into the battle; but put thou on thy robes. And the king of Israel disguised himself, and went into the battle" (ver. 30). While Ahab is to disguise himself, or, in other words, to go forth in the ordinary armour of a common soldier, Jehoshaphat is to retain his royal robes and assume the command. The design of the crafty prince is so far successful. His too easy friend accepts the post of honour, as being the post of danger too. The dauntless spirit of this honourable man suspected no fraud in his ally, and shrunk from no force of the enemy. How narrowly he escaped without paying the penalty of his confidence and complaisance, we may afterwards remark. Meantime, what are we to think of the meanness of him who could thus treacherously impose upon another the conduct and hazard of his own unholy enterprise, and that other, too, his sworn comrade, his friend?—what but that there can be no friendship, no honour at all, in a confederacy of sin, a confederacy against God? Cowardice, treachery, these are the characteristics of an evil conscience and a doubtful cause. Ahab was perhaps no coward naturally, no traitor to the sanctities of friendship; yet how unscrupulously does he sacrifice his friend and ally to the dastardly hope of shifting away from himself the sin and danger of the step that he is taking?

And what are we to expect but that, false to his God, a man will be false to his friend also. Especially in any matter in which he has sought to fortify his own wavering resolution by his friend's companionship, he

will try to make that friend's godly character available as a shield and cover for his own sin.

Let none trust the fidelity of him who is not faithful to his best, his kindest, his most generous benefactor,—his Saviour, his God. Consult your own conscience. When you are prepared to violate the restraints of God's holy law, and to despise the warning of his holy prophets, will you stand upon much ceremony with the cobweb delicacies of courtesy and kindness,—of that honour which is but breath, and that friendship which is but a name? will you hesitate one moment to endanger the peace, the safety, or the reputation, even of the man who treats you with the most simple and confiding frankness? will you scruple to turn his simplicity to your own account, and to play and work upon his confidence? You will try to make him as bad as you are yourselves; perhaps a little worse. By flattery, by solicitations, by false representations of your design, you will persuade him to join you—to give you his consent and countenance—to take a lead perhaps in your enterprise. Under pretence of honouring him, deferring to his advice, and trusting in his wisdom, you will propose that he should stand forward while you occupy the back ground. And if you succeed, how will you secretly exult! And if he be a good man, you will triumph all the more. You will lay all the blame and all the risk on him; and under his wing you will think that you are safe.

But will the treacherous and cowardly device avail?—did it in the case of Ahab?

No; God is not mocked. He sees the trembling caitiff

under his mean disguise. And in the random shot which struck the guilty prince we recognise the immediate hand of the Lord in judgment.

The expedient, indeed, has apparently almost answered Ahab's purpose. His friend, the king of Judah, as he expected, is mistaken for him, and becomes the mark for a thousand weapons: "And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, Surely it is the king of Israel. And they turned aside to fight against him: and Jehoshaphat cried out" (ver. 32). Ahab himself in the meantime escapes detection, and is exulting in the success of his scheme, and in his own security; when, as if to mark him out as the victim, not of man, but of God, no well-aimed dart, but an arrow sent at a venture, becomes to him the unerring bolt of wrath, and accomplishes his just and predetermined doom: "And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness; wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded" (ver. 34).

It is thus, O sinner! that the judgment of God will overtake you, and "your sin will find you out." You may follow the multitude to do evil, and, mingling in the multitude undistinguished and unobserved, you may seem to get rid of your own individual responsibility and your own individual risk. You may flatter yourself that in your worldly course you have lost and merged your own particular share of the guilt and hazard in the general mass, and, as one of many involved in a common liability,

are not specially marked and specially doomed. You may place before you, in the foremost rank, some dear friend, some greater and better man than yourself, who can better stand the brunt of battle. Against him the charge must be made; on him the fault, if any, must lie: he stands between you and judgment, and under the warrant and with the excuse of his authority, you feel yourself secure.

Still, "be sure your sin will find you out." An arrow drawn at a venture will enter your soul. The Lord singles you out individually, and separately deals with you. There is a shaft of conviction or a bolt of wrath on the wing, rushing seemingly at random through mid air—the arrow of Christ the king shot from his word, his gospel. Whose heart shall it sharply pierce? Yours, O sinner! though a high name lead you, and a high example authorize you. Then stand forth now from the crowd alone, singly, separately, pierced in your heart now, that you may not be pierced hereafter. Flee from the camp and company of the wicked. "Say not, A confederacy, to whom this people say, A confederacy, neither fear ye their fear; but sanctify the Lord of hosts in your heart, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread." Beware of Ahab's doom. Beware of Ahab's sin. Trifle not with the remonstrances of God. Abuse not his long-suffering. Resist not his Spirit, when he is, in long-suffering patience, striving with you. In particular,—

1. Beware of the beginning of Ahab's evil course—his fatal compromise with the enemy of his peace. See that you enter into no terms with any sin, and that you be not hardened through its deceitfulness. When God in

Christ gives you the victory, delivering you from condemnation by his free grace, and upholding you by his free Spirit; when, justified and accepted in the Beloved, you see every sin of yours prostrate beneath your feet, stripped of all its power to slay or to enslave you—be sure that you make thorough work in following out the advantage you have gained—that you listen to no plausible proposals of concession—that you suffer no iniquity to escape—that you mortify every lust. For, if a single iniquity be tolerated, or allowed, or indulged; if a single sin remain alive; if, deceived by Satan's sophistry, you let your vanquished enemy go, and trust to his fair promises of moderation and good behaviour—who can tell what a thorn in the flesh that one enemy may prove to you, what a root of bitterness to spring up and trouble you! How soon may you be led into Ahab's course of impatience, presumption, and rebellion! To what shifts and subtleties of an unsatisfied conscience may you be compelled, like him, to resort! How, by one petty sin unmortified and unsubdued, may your peace be disturbed, your heart hardened, and your soul involved again in danger and in death! Let your prayer, O penitent believer! be the prayer of the psalmist: "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins: let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer."

2. Beware of provoking a slumbering foe. If there be any enemy of your peace to whom, by former compliances or concessions, you have given an advantage over you, beware of invading his territories again. Be on your guard against the very first beginnings of evil—of any evil especially that you have ever, in all your past lives, tolerated, or flattered, or fondled in your bosoms, when you should have been nailing it, without pity, to your Saviour's cross. You may have many plausible reasons for venturing into nearer and closer contact with it than is at all necessary or safe. You may wish to recover a lost opportunity of grappling with it in the death-struggle of repentance and faith; you may wish to assert your Christian liberty and power. But, oh! beware, if conscience whisper that there is in you any latent lurking remnant of the spirit that made you once indulgent towards that sin, or anything like that sin. "Look not on the wine-cup when it is red." "Make a covenant with thine eyes that they behold not a maid." "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

3. Beware of the deceitfulness of sin. The wiles of the devil are not unknown to you. In a doubtful case, where you are hesitating, it is easy for him to insinuate and suggest reasons enough to make the worse appear the better cause. Generally you may detect his sophistry by its complex character. Truth is simple; the word of God is plain: "Come out from among them and be ye

separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing." The voice of conscience also is clear: "How can I do this wickedness, and sin against God?"

4. Beware of being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Beware of a judicial hardening of your hearts, or of your being given over to believe a lie. Imagine to yourselves what may be at this very moment going on in the high court of heaven concerning you. It may be your case that is under consideration; it may be the crisis of your fate that is come. No Micaiah is here, indeed, to unfold the solemn scene; but something in your own conscience may tell of it. There is a hesitancy: Felix trembles—Agrippa is moved. It is not yet too late; you are at the very point of the decisive choice. All is trembling in the balance. Then, to-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts. Trifle not with the convictions of conscience or the strivings of the Spirit of God. Beware of provoking and incurring the sentence—"Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone;" or the judgment indicated by Him who is the faithful and true witness, in his parable of the barren fig-tree—"Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" the judgment which, after all suitable influences have been applied in vain, is acquiesced in by the intercessor himself as in the last resort inevitable—"Then after that thou shalt cut it down" (Luke xiii. 6-9).

VI.

THE FORBEARANCE OF GOD IN THE CASE OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

CHARACTER OF JEHOSHAPHAT.

1 KINGS xxii.; 2 CHRON. xviii. xix.

"SHOULDEST thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord" (2 Chron. xix. 2),—such is the reproof administered by Jehu the seer to Jehoshaphat, on his return from the unsuccessful warfare in which he had been engaged with the king of Israel against the Syrians. In the history of that event we have an interesting exhibition of character, especially of the characters of the two leaders of the Jewish host—Ahab king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat king of Judah. In Ahab we have an instance of a wicked man partially reclaimed, frequently arrested, but yet finally hardened in his iniquity. In Jehoshaphat, again, we have a still more affecting example. We see how a man, upright before God, and sincere in serving him, may be betrayed into weak compliances; and how dangerous and melancholy the consequences of these compliances may be.

The general uprightness of Jehoshaphat, his sincerity in serving God, is expressly acknowledged and commended by the prophet in the very act of condemning his sin (ver. 3): "Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the

land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek the Lord." And this high and honourable commendation corresponds with what we elsewhere read concerning his character and conduct. The 17th chapter of Second Chronicles gives an account of his piety and zeal at the beginning of his reign, and before the event to which the prophet refers; and the 19th and 20th chapters prove the continuance of these excellent dispositions, even after that most sad and untoward occurrence. We read of his labours in removing idolatry out of the land, and restoring the worship of the true God (xvii. 6); of his attention to the religious instruction of the people (xvii. 7); of his concern for the administration of justice (xix. 5); and of his care for the defence of his people against their enemies, by the best of all resources—an appeal to God (xx.): on all which accounts he was eminently favoured by God with prosperity at home and honour from abroad;—the attachment of his people, the submission of his hostile neighbours, the tribute of many nations, and the blessing of Jehovah, the God of David, whom he feared.

Such a prince, we might naturally imagine, opposed to all corruption in the worship of God, would be especially studious to keep himself and his people separate from the heathenism and idolatry of the adjoining kingdom of Israel. He could have no sympathy with the spirit which animated that kingdom under the auspices of the infamous Jezebel—no toleration for the abuses which prevailed after she had secured the open establishment of the very worst form of paganism. His aim must surely be to avoid as far as possible all communion with a

nation which could only insnare and corrupt his own people.

Yet, strange to tell, the besetting sin of this good man was a tendency to connect himself with idolaters. The single fault charged against this godly prince is his frequent alliance with his ungodly neighbours. This is the very offence for which he is reproved by the prophet. And this offence he more than once committed in the course of his reign—courting, or at least accepting, the friendly advances of the kingdom of Israel; and that in three several ways.

Thus, in the first place, Jehoshaphat consented to a treaty of marriage, probably at the beginning of his reign (2 Chron. xviii. 1). He "joined affinity with Ahab" by marrying his son to Ahab's daughter (2 Kings viii. 18). This was the first overture towards an alliance. It is a policy common among princes—though, alas! too often ineffectual—for uniting their royal families and their respective nations. It is the very policy of which in our own history we have several examples, in the intermarriages of the heirs of the two crowns in this island; whence, by the blessing of God, has resulted that solid union which, in his mercy, may he long preserve! The powerful monarchs of the south, after vainly endeavouring to subdue their poorer northern neighbour,—whose proud and singular boast it is, that, poor as she is, she has never yet yielded to a foreign yoke,—were content to win by courtship what they could not conquer by arms, and to welcome on a footing of affinity the people who would not be held as subjects. In accordance with this policy,

then, the king of Judah sought to conciliate the friendship of the king of Israel, by mingling the blood of their royal races; not, however, with the same happy consequence, but, as it turned out, with most disastrous issues.

Then, secondly, Jehoshaphat twice joined in a league of war with the kings of Israel; first, in the expedition against Syria which we have been considering; and again, shortly after in an attack upon the Moabites (2 Kings iii. 7). This latter confederacy being formed against a common enemy, who had given both of them provocation, was not so unjustifiable, nor was it so unfortunate as the other: it received the sanction of Elisha's counsel and of the Lord's signal interposition. But the warlike alliance into which, of his own accord, he entered, issued in nought but evil.

Lastly, in the third place, Jehoshaphat consented, though reluctantly, in the close of his reign, to a commercial alliance of his people with the ten tribes. It appears (1 Kings xxii. 48) that once before, when asked by the king of Israel to concur in a joint expedition of their two navies to Ophir for gold, Jehoshaphat promptly and peremptorily refused, having then had fresh and recent experience, in the Syrian war, of the danger of his connection with Ahab. But yet afterwards (2 Chron. xx. 35-37) he agreed to a similar proposal;—on which occasion he was again rebuked by the prophet of the Lord, and again visited with signal judgment. "The ships were broken," and the expedition ruined;—"they were not able to go to Tarshish."

Such, then, was Jehoshaphat, and such his besetting sin

Now, this infirmity in so excellent a person—especially as manifested in that confederacy with the king of Israel of which we have already been tracing the dismal consummation—is well worthy of our study, both to ascertain its cause and to trace its effects; first, to find out the probable reasons or motives of Jehoshaphat's conduct in this matter, and then to expose its folly, its sinfulness, its danger, and its evil fruit.

As to the sin itself with which Jehoshaphat is charged, and the probable reasons or motives of its commission,—we cannot suppose that, in forming an alliance with the ungodly, Jehoshaphat was actuated by fondness for the crime, or by complacency in the criminal. We must seek an explanation of his conduct rather in mistaken views of policy than in any considerable indifference to the honour of God, or any leaning to the defections of apostasy and idolatry. For this end, let us consider the relative situation of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, and the feelings which their respective kings, with their subjects, mutually cherished towards one another.

The first effect of Jeroboam's revolt with the ten tribes from the house of David, was a bitter and irreconcilable hostility between the two rival kingdoms of the ten, and of the two tribes. All friendly intercourse was interrupted, mutual jealousy and suspicion prevailed, and the minds of men on both sides were exasperated and inflamed by a succession of reciprocal injuries and insults. The division was marked by all the warmth of religious controversy, and the implacable rancour of civil and

domestic feud. The kings of Judah could keep no terms with rebels against the Lord and his anointed David; while it was manifestly the policy of the revolted princes to make the breach irreparable, by keeping alive and aggravating feelings of animosity among the Israelites against their brethren of Judah. And, as if to widen and perpetuate the breach, each party in turn had recourse to the expedient of calling in foreign aid against the other. At the instigation probably of Jeroboam, Shishak, king of Egypt, who had formerly been his patron and protector, invaded Judah. And again, by way of retaliation, the king of Judah soon after invited the Syrians to ravage the territory of the hostile kingdom of Israel, (2 Chron. xii. and xvi.)

Thus these two kindred nations, when the quarrel was yet recent and the wound rankled, hated and devoured one another.

In course of time, however, when a generation or two passed away, something like a change, or a tendency to approximation, began to appear. The feelings of hostility had in some degree subsided, the memory of former union had revived, and the idea might again not unnaturally suggest itself to a wise and patriotic statesman, of consolidating once more into a powerful empire communities which, although recently estranged, had yet a common origin, a common history, a common name, and, till lately, a common faith,—whose old recollections and associations were all in common. The manifest folly, too, of exposing themselves, by intestine division, to foreign invasion, and even employing foreigners against each other, might

prompt the desire of bringing the kingdoms to act harmoniously together, whether in peace or in war. Such might very reasonably be the views of an able, enlightened, and conscientious sovereign, pursuing simply, in a sense, the good of his country; and such, probably, were the views of Jehoshaphat. His favourite aim and design seems to have been, to conciliate the king and people of Israel; at least, he was always ready to listen to any proposals of conciliation. He, no doubt, thought that he could secure all the advantages of an amicable intercourse without incurring its dangers—that he could sufficiently guard himself and his people from the contamination of evil influence and evil example—that they could derive all the benefit to be desired from mixing with their neighbours in things temporal, without losing their own superior privileges in things spiritual. Nay, we may believe that this good man contemplated the communication of these privileges to his outcast brethren of Israel, and proposed, by the course which he adopted, to leaven them with the spirit of a better faith, and ultimately bring them back again to the legitimate dominion of the house of David, and the pure worship of the God of their fathers.

If so, his object was certainly not unlawful; but in the pursuit of it, he was tempted to an unlawful compromise of principle. In his anxiety to pacify, to conciliate, and to reclaim, he was tempted to go a little too far,—even to the sacrificing of his own high integrity, and the apparent countenancing of other men's iniquities. Here lay the error of this pious prince; and here it was that

he suffered the subtlety of worldly wisdom, and the spurious kindness of worldly liberality, to interfere with the simplicity of an upright and honourable faith in God, and a godly love towards men. To desire the restoration of his brethren of Israel to the privileges of the covenant which they had renounced, was natural, just, and right, in one who himself valued these privileges so highly; but with this view, and under this pretence, to make friendly advances towards them, and show a disposition to unite with them, in their present state of apostasy and idolatry —this was imprudence—this was sin.

And is not this the very sin of many good and serious Christians, who manifest to the world, its follies and its vices, a certain mild and tolerant spirit, and are disposed to treat the men of the world with a sort of easy and indulgent complacency; justifying or excusing such concessions to themselves by the fond persuasion, that they are but seeking, or at least that they are promoting, the world's reformation? No doubt, it is your duty to conciliate all men, if you can; but there is such a thing as conciliating, and conciliating, and conciliating, till you conciliate away all the distinctive characteristics of your faith. It is true, that in your intercourse with the world you are bound to be patient, long-suffering, and kind, as your God is patient, long-suffering, and kind, even to the evil and the unthankful. You are to love the most abandoned with all that intensity of compassionate regard with which God has loved an ungodly race. By all words of sympathy, by all acts of true liberality, by the cultivation of all the charities and all the courtesies of

social intercourse, by self-denial and self-sacrifice, by all frank and cordial testimonies of affection, you are to demonstrate your own and your heavenly Father's good-will, if by any means, heaping coals of fire on their head, you may melt them to penitence and love. But to make men see and feel how gladly you on earth, and your Father in heaven, would welcome them as penitents,—this is one thing. To make them suppose that you are willing to receive them on terms of friendship while still impenitent,—this is quite another. To treat them as if their impenitence formed no serious obstacle to the closest and most familiar intimacy; to mix and unite with them, as if you could tolerate, and even admire, their frailties, their excesses, their loose maxims and opinions;—this is to attempt a union between light and darkness, between Christ and Belial—an attempt alike vain and sinful, dangerous to yourselves and ruinous to them.

If, therefore, there are any in the Church of Christ who are sometimes tempted—and who shall say that he is not?—to advance too far in this line of concession and conciliation, and these overtures of friendly conformity to the world, and to plead that they are not thus contaminated themselves, but that they rather season the world's corruption in the circles in which they move, by the admixture of their own purer principles and practices;—we bid them look to Jehoshaphat and his unholy alliance with the idolatrous king of Israel. Let them consider what the real effect of such conduct was in his case, and what must be the effect of similar conduct in theirs. Let them observe its vanity and folly, for it fails

to serve, or rather tends to hinder, the good purpose they intend; its sin, as it regards their own testimony for God and maintenance of sound principle; its danger, as it puts to hazard their peace and safety; and its mischievous tendency to encourage the evil course and accelerate the ruin of the very men whom they profess that they desire to benefit.

Thus, as to the first point, Jehoshaphat, when he consented to an alliance with the king of Israel, no doubt contemplated the possibility of doing him some good. He thought that his influence and example might operate as a check on the violence of his ally. He intended to interpose, at fitting seasons and opportunities, his advice, his remonstrance, his authority; and flattered himself that, under his control, the measures of the headstrong prince would assume a milder and more moderate, as well as more religious character, than was their wont.

Such was his hope. How in point of fact was it realized? Do we find the presence of the Jewish king at all restraining the impetuosity of Ahab's counsels? No; but his presence gives to these counsels a weight and a plausibility which, without his countenance and consent, they never would have had. Do we find Jehoshaphat boldly resisting and opposing the ungodliness of his new friend? Ah, no! his voice of rebuke is feeble and unheeded. Hear how he answers Ahab's impious avowal of the hatred which he bore to the true prophet of the Lord. Is it in the tone of manly and honest indignation which it deserved? No; but with a puny,

pitiful, girlish gentleness of expostulation—"Let not the king say so." And when the prophet is insolently buffeted by one of Ahab's minions, and consigned to unmerited imprisonment by the chafed monarch himself, what has this godly king to say against such atrocities? What! not a word? No! for not a word from him will now be regarded. He has lost his high prerogative of reproof. He has descended from his footing of unquestioned and uncompromised integrity, and involved himself irretrievably in the very course he should be rebuking. In a word, do we find this pious prince exerting any salutary influence at all over Ahab's manners, or principles, or pursuits? No; but we see him a tool, a dupe, and well-nigh a victim, in the hands of one too crafty and too headstrong for him to manage.

And so it must ever be. The very first step a good man takes from the eminence on which he stands apart, as the friend of God and the unflinching enemy of all ungodliness in the world, he compromises his authority, his influence, his right and power of bold remonstrance and unsparing testimony against the corrupt lusts and the angry passions of men. He gives up the point of principle, and as to any resistance that he may make in details, men see not what there is left to fight for. If you make concessions to the weak, the wicked, or the worldly, and enter into their plans, and sit down with them in their indulgences, you renounce the advantage which the consciousness of untarnished honour and unimpeached consistency, and that alone, can give you over them; you put yourself on their level; you are at their

mercy; you are one of themselves; and it must be with an ill grace and a feeble effect that you venture timidly to stand forth either as God's witness or as their reprover. Whatever you gain by conciliation, you lose far more by forfeiting the respect and reverence which firm integrity commands. You may consent to mix with them familiarly on terms of friendship and companionship; you may thus gain their easy and indolent good-will;—but you gain something very like their contempt too; and a sort of feeble paralysis comes over you in the very attempt to be faithful. Your voice of censure loses all its commanding energy; your look of disapprobation loses all its keenness; your presence is no longer felt to be a restraint on folly; your severity cannot awe, your tenderness cannot touch;—you can but feebly "hint a doubt, and hesitate dislike." To assume a high tone and take high ground now, would but excite ridicule by its absurdity, or anger by its impertinence. Your right to testify, your influence to persuade, your power of rebuke, alas! are all gone.

Is not this the natural, the necessary result of such a conciliatory course? If you condescend to flatter men in their vanities, will they listen to you when you gravely reprehend their sins? No; they will laugh you to scorn. If you countenance them in the beginning of their excess, will they patiently bear your authoritative denunciation of its end? No; they will contemptuously reject it as a fond folly, or indignantly resent it as an insult. If you go with them one mile, may they not almost expect you to go two?—at least, you have no right to take it very much amiss if they go the two miles themselves.

Settle it, then, in your minds, as a fixed principle, that if you would preserve unimpaired your privilege of testifying for God, and would not be disqualified for discharging a very sacred trust, and performing a very sacred duty, you must beware of a single step in the way of such conciliation as Jehoshaphat's. If you would have your influence, your example, your character and conduct, to be of any weight in the world on the side of divine truth and holiness, be very careful, by the grace of God, to keep yourselves unspotted from the world.

But, in the second place, Jehoshaphat not only failed to arrest Ahab in his sinful course,—he was himself involved in its sinfulness Instead of reclaiming this wicked prince, he was himself betrayed into a participation in his wickedness,—he joined him in his unholy expedition.

And be sure, we say to all professing Christians, that you too, if you try thus artfully to gain the advantage over the world, will find the world too much for you. For Satan, the god of this world, is far more than a match for you in this game of craft, and compromise, and conciliation. Beware how you step out of your own proper sphere, as a separate and peculiar people, to provoke such a trial of skill with Satan or his practised votaries and advocates; and that, too, in their own haunts —the haunts of their own worldly vanities; and on their own ground—the ground of their own worldly modes and maxims. Be sure that they are to the full as able to argue the point with you, as you are to persuade or con-

vince them. They are as likely, at the least, to pervert you as you are to convert them. You may take part with them in their counsels, and cultivate their friendship, hoping to influence them towards good; but beware lest the tables be turned upon you, and they influence you towards evil. Remember, that from man to man holiness diffuses and spreads its healthful savour far more slowly and less extensively than sin disperses its contagious poison. The contact of your holiness may not sanctify them; the touch of their sin will certainly contaminate you. It is your purpose, in joining with them, to stop them short at a certain point. Are you quite sure that you can stop short at that point yourselves,—that you will not, when you come to it, feel yourselves committed, and be easily persuaded that, having gone so far with them, it is needless to scruple about going yet a little farther?

Then go not along with them at all—no, not a single step: for a single step implies tampering, in so far, with your religious and conscientious scruples; and when these are once weakly or wilfully compromised, Satan's battle is gained. The rest is all a question of time and of degree. Your spiritual faith, and your moral principles, are henceforth at the world's disposal. Your safety lies in resisting at the outset, before the world's cold and subtle influence has debauched your hearts and perplexed your understandings. The first prompt decisions of a conscience convinced of sin, and a soul touched with the Saviour's love, will, in most cases, be right; but when you give time for the world to ply you with its manifold

considerations of doubtful expediency—when you once entertain the world's insidious inquiry, May I? Is it lawful? Are you sure that what I long to do is positively wrong?—ah! then you are already involved in the tide and current that may soon sweep you into the resistless whirlpool, where so many promises and so many professions, once as trustworthy as yours, are day after day engulfed.

Stand fast, then, in your liberty. "All things are lawful unto you, but all things are not expedient." Be not yourselves "brought under the power of any;" and consider what may "edify" the Church and glorify God (1 Cor. vi. 12 and x. 23). Stand fast in your integrity. Be faithful to Him who calleth and appointeth you to be children in his house;—"faithful in that which is least," as well as "faithful in much" (Luke xvi. 10). Then, and then only, may you expect him to be faithful to you, and to keep your eyes from tears, your feet from falling, and your souls from death.

For, thirdly, see what hazard Jehoshaphat ran. Not only did he sin with Ahab, but he was on the point of perishing with him in his sin. Betrayed by his false ally and associate, who could meanly consult his own safety by exposing his friend to danger, Jehoshaphat was saved, but scarcely saved, by faith and prayer, and that only in the last extremity: "And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, It is the king of Israel. Therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the

Lord helped him; and God moved them to depart from him" (2 Chron. xviii. 31).

The interposition was seasonable; it was just in time, and no more than in time. And critical as it was, was it not more than he had any reason to expect? Was it not a deliverance on which he had no right to calculate? It was by his own fault, and against express divine warning, that he was involved in this hazard, and he might justly have been left to take the consequences of his own perverseness. His narrow escape was a cause of peculiar thankfulness to himself, but not a warrant of presumptuous confidence to others. It was a signal and special act of most undeserved mercy.

And think not, O Christian! that you may depend upon a similar act of mercy when you tempt the Lord as Jehoshaphat did. If you consent to the schemes of vain, wicked, or worldly men, and compromise your devotion to God out of courtesy and complaisance to them, you may be very sure that, as in Jehoshaphat's case, they will take advantage of your easy and accommodating spirit, to put the blame and the danger on you. But you cannot be at all so sure that God will come so very opportunely to your rescue. He is in no way bound to do so. For it is not a hazard which you have encountered in his service and at his call, but a risk incurred through your own weak folly or wilful self-confidence; and why should you not be left to reap the fruit of your unwise compliance with the world's sin, by sharing largely in the world's doom?

But suppose that God deals with you far more kindly

than you deserve, and in the hour of threatened and courted ruin your prayer is heard, and you are saved from sinking in the deep pit and the miry clay, and your feet are set again upon a rock, and your goings established,—we have still, in the fourth place, one other consideration to urge. Look to the mischief which your compliance brings on others. Here we might speak of the many evils which the weak and worldly policy of Jehoshaphat entailed upon his family and people. We might show how his connection by marriage with the house of Ahab led, in another generation, to the introduction of all the vices and abominations of that idolatrous house into his own court and kingdom. We might show also how, in the present instance, notwithstanding his own escape, his army and his subjects suffered by his rashness; and we might remind you of the harm which you may do, by involving your friends, your children, or your dependants, in the consequences of your folly,—from which you may yourselves be delivered,—by encouraging them through your example, and leading them on in the way of sin, and shame, and sorrow. But we rather choose to confine your view to a single point, and we ask you to remark how Jehoshaphat's countenance contributed to the ruin of the infatuated and unfortunate prince whom he assisted and seconded in his mad career.

The king of Judah was saved himself, as by fire; but his ally, his confederate, was lost. And had he no hand, had he no concern, in the loss? And when he came to reflection, had he no cause of self-reproach—no blame to take to himself? Had he faithfully warned his friend?

Had he honestly remonstrated with him? Had he fearlessly protested against him, and sharply rebuked and withstood him? Oh! such wounds would have been kind and precious. But he had been too merciful; he had been pitiful, falsely pitiful,—fondly, foolishly indulgent; he had spared his companion's feelings; he had dealt mildly and gently with him; he had seemed to consent, or at least to acquiesce. Alas! might not the perishing outcast too truly plead, that in every step of his sinful and fatal career he had the sanction of a righteous man? 'And oh! what would that righteous man now give for the recollection of but a single word affectionately spoken in strong and stern expostulation?

Friends and Christian brethren! what a thought is this, that, in making flattering advances to sinners, and dealing smoothly with their sins, you not only endanger your own peace, but you accelerate and promote their ruin! You may save yourselves by tardy yet timely repentance; you may extricate yourselves ere it be too late;—but can you save, can you extricate those whom your example has encouraged, or your presence has authorized? We speak not of the evil which in your unconverted state you may have done,—that is bad enough to suggest many bitter recollections; but we speak of the evil which even in your character of believers you have unwarily and incautiously sanctioned,—that you should feel to be even worse. Think of any single sin which you have seen committed,—any single excess of word or action that has occurred in your presence or within your knowledge. Did you testify against it? Did you boldly stand forth

to protest and to condemn? Did you decidedly separate yourself? Oh! you said a few words, perhaps, to save your credit; you feebly started an objection, and ventured timidly to suggest a hint. But did you faithfully and fearlessly start back at once from the scene, and disavow all sympathy and all toleration? Nay, did you not rather, by your light mode of speech,—by lending your countenance before, and continuing to lend it still,—convey the idea, that though for decency's sake you opposed, you were not very earnest in your opposition? And are you sure that this idea did not tend to encourage the offender? May it not be, that had you not at first acquiesced so easily, and at last remonstrated so faintly, the offence might not have been committed?

And when you think of some such individual perishing in some such sin,—in sin which you seemed yourselves to countenance and tolerate,—O what depth of sorrow and self-abasement can ever exhaust the repentance due for so grievous a wrong? What earnestness of unceasing prayer is needed to guard against so dangerous a weakness! We ask you, the very best of you, Have you not to charge yourselves with some such compromise and compliance! We ask you, Have you felt the guilt of it as you ought? Have you repented of it as so aggravated an injustice ought to be repented of? Have you seen that there may lie upon you the burden not of your own sins merely, but of the sins of other men, of which you have been partakers? Have you ever considered what it may be to have to answer for the loss and ruin of immortal souls? Think what it would be to have the

dying blasphemer point to you, and say, 'It was you who, by your decent profession, your little concessions and conformities, your moderate indulgences—it was you who, by your easy tone of levity, by your air of indifference, or by a word, a look, of sympathy with sin—it was you who emboldened me to go on!'

The thought is too dreadful for us to dwell on; and especially so when we consider that even good men, holy men, servants of God, have suffered themselves to be thus criminal, and thus cruel. Well said the patriarch, of the ungodly, "My soul, come not thou into their secret;" have no fellowship with them; advance not, draw not near to their council—no, not a step, not for a single hour. You may be putting to hazard your own principles, and fearfully aggravating and hastening their condemnation. And will God not visit for these things? Will he not rebuke the saint's weak compliance as well as the sinner's wilful sin? True he will not acquit the sinner, though he may plead the saint's infirmity as his excuse; for, after all, he sins wilfully. But will he on that account hold his saints guiltless? Must not this as well as their other sins, this infirmity with its sad results, "find them out"—so as to be made sensible to their awakened conscience? and can it be so, if their hearts are touched with a feeling for lost souls,—can it be so, without almost the very agony of remorse?

O beware how you treasure up for future hours of disquietude and despondency—for the season of desertion—for the dark and doubtful death-bed—in addition to too many other sad recollections, the memory of sins

tolerated and sinners emboldened, through your simplicity, your timidity, your faint resistance, or your half-hinted consent! Truly you have need of sound wisdom and high principle in your walk through an evil world. The men of the world are ready enough to misunderstand even what is right in you, and to speak evil even of what is good. Give them no room for the sly remark, the shrewd suspicion, the insinuated doubt, which the very appearance of evil in you will suggest. Plead not an innocent or a laudable design, as though your policy might tend to win souls. Be not wiser than your God; but be faithful to him. It were hard to say how much of the world's carelessness in sin, as well as of the ill success of the gospel, may be ascribed to the feebleness of the testimony which believers bear against the world, and the uncertain sound which their trumpet gives. Let there be more decision among true Christians, a higher tone of feeling, a higher standard of conduct—greater consistency, greater earnestness, greater separation,—a more unequivocal zeal for God, a more unhesitating care and consideration for the interests of righteousness and the souls of men; and the people of the world may be made at last to know and feel that Christianity does put a real distinction, now and for ever, between them and the people of God. Alas for the tendency of many a Christian's walk to cherish the very opposite delusion! When unconverted men find you in their company, free and unconstrained, nay, ready to go along with them in some doubtful liberty of pleasure, or some questionable plan of profit, do they understand, can they be satisfied, that you really believe them to be in a

lost and guilty state? Are you at any pains to show them and make them feel that you believe this? Would it not be benevolent in you to do so? Are they under the wrath of God?—are they going down to hell? Do you believe that they are? And is it fair, is it generous, is it kind, to leave them, amid all your intercourse with them, still by possibility under the impression that, after all, you cannot seriously think the difference between you and them so very vital, else you would scarcely treat them and their plans and pleasures so favourably as they see that you do? Your tender mercies are cruel indeed, if such be the issue of them! Be sure that, not less out of charity to them than out of a regard to your own safety, it concerns you to realize, and to live as realizing, the momentous truth—"We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John v. 19). Such knowledge is no nurse of vain-glory; for it implies a recognition of the free gift of God: "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life" (1 John v. 20). And it deepens and renders intense the feeling of duty and responsibility: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen" (1 John v. 21).

VII.

HEROD—WEAKNESS GROWING INTO WICKEDNESS.

ON THE CHARACTER OF HEROD, TETRARCH OF GALILEE.

MARK vi. 14–19.

"And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her."—MARK vi. 26.

THERE is a very remarkable quality to be observed in the evangelical histories; it is the tone of calm simplicity and candour which uniformly pervades them. Among many singular and admirable characteristics of their style and manner of composition, this is not the least. There is everywhere a mild and passionless equanimity, a quiet dignity, which marks the guidance and superintendence of a spirit truly divine. Not a trace, not a vestige or feature, anywhere occurs of wrath, or bitterness, or envy, or railing accusation, or evil speaking, or malice, or resentment,—or any of those seeds and symptoms of human passion, which are so apt to disfigure the writings of uninspired men on subjects which interest and excite their feelings. With entire self-possession, or rather with an entire oblivion and forgetfulness of self, they write as the disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus,—who, when reviled, reviled not again,—when buffeted, threatened not.

Nor is theirs the calmness of affected philosophic im-

partiality,—the indifference or insensibility which some think it the height of wisdom to assume when they write, as if in carelessness or in scorn of all the high and spirit-stirring recollections, and the deep, heart-moving associations, which their subject should suggest. The writers of the New Testament are not thus destitute of interest and sympathy in what they write. They write with feeling. They write from the heart. None, indeed, could write narratives so simply and profoundly cordial and hearty, without being hearty and cordial themselves. But yet what is remarkable in them is, that they are never betrayed or hurried into the slightest excess. There is not a word, not a hint, of extravagance or exaggeration, or unbecoming heat and intemperance: all is fervour, indeed; but it is the chastened and subdued fervour of heavenly meekness. They never lose their temper. They are never hastily provoked to utter unadvisedly one single sentence. They never wonder, though they have wonderful things to tell of. They never fret or rage, though they have intolerable wrongs to set forth. They show no studied enthusiasm to recommend their cause,—no impatient resentment against its adversaries; although theirs was a cause to rouse from their depths all the soul's emotions of admiration, exultation, triumph, and revenge. Still there is no violence of feeling in what they write, but a plain and temperate record of facts.

And is not this especially singular? Is it not a proof of divine influence restraining all human pride and human wrath, and leaving nothing but the forbearance and single-minded devotion to the majesty of sacred truth,

becoming the historians of Heaven's own acts and counsels? Even when they are most tempted to launch forth into declamation, or to indulge in invective, still all the narrative is calm.

Here, for instance, what an occasion had they for impassioned oratory! What a handle for stirring men's minds might they have seized in the tale of cruel wrong which they had to relate! No colours could be too dark to paint the atrocity of the transaction; no language strong enough to denounce and stigmatize the perpetrators of so foul an enormity. There is the mean and dastard tyrant, who would fain have been a villain had he dared, but whose coward spirit made him a mere tool. There are the monsters in female form, whom unhallowed lust and passion converted into blood-hounds. And the deed itself!—unparalleled in the annals of cold-blooded crime, a match for the blackest cruelties of the blackest pages of Roman story, casting quite into the shade that savage inhumanity which could make its jest of slaughter, and find a fit accompaniment for its strains of levity in the carnage and conflagration of a devoted city! Here was an occasion that seemed to justify, nay, to call for indignation,—here was a theme on which the friends of the murdered and martyred saint might well be expected to grow warm.

But no. They forget not their character as historians of heavenly truth. They condescend to no vivid painting, no passionate upbraiding. They simply discharge their office, and tell their story. Nay, it appears almost as if, instead of exposing the full and aggravated enor-

mity of the crime, they were willing rather to say what could be said in the way of extenuation and excuse. Instead of enlarging on its horrors, they hint rather at what might be received as some palliation, or at least some explanation of the affair. "The king was exceeding sorry,"—he was not willing to do this cruelty,—he shrunk from it; it was, in a manner, forced upon him after much reluctance and regret.

What more could a professed apologist of Herod,—what more could the prince's warmest friend and admirer,—have suggested? What more could he have desired to see put on record, in extenuation of Herod's conduct? The deed was not properly his own,—he was compelled to it against his will,—"he was exceeding sorry;" but there was a necessity; he could not help it.

How different is all this from the spirit that appears in the ordinary historians of the Church's wrongs, and the biographers of her injured servants! In them there is still too much of man's corrupt spirit of retaliation, and the infirmity of vain-glorious boasting. Nor is it wonderful. They are but men,—men of like passions with their fellows, and not under any special or supernatural guidance of the good Spirit of God. We blame them not; nay, we praise them rather; greatly preferring their honest warmth to the affected coldness that is too wise to wonder, and too refined to be ruffled or discomposed. But the difference we have adverted to is worthy of notice, as affording no mean proof of the inspiration of the Scriptures.

Thus, in the instance before us, this manner of rela-

tion on the part of the sacred writers serves to introduce Herod to the best advantage for himself, while it gives us also a key to the solution of his character: "And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her."

"The king was exceeding sorry."—Some interpreters have shrewdly suspected that this sorrow was feigned,—that the whole scene of this banquet was a preconcerted scheme, to which not only Herodias and her daughter, but Herod himself was privy, in order to get rid of the Baptist, who had become alike obnoxious to them all. Herod dared not openly do him wrong, for fear of the people, who counted John a prophet. He fell, therefore, upon the expedient of throwing the guilt of the original suggestion on his accomplices. The feast—the dance—the sudden admiration—the rash promise—the late repentance—all seemingly natural and incidental, were artfully got up, that Herod, to the public eye, might be represented as a reluctant victim rather than a willing actor. He is, to save appearances, to be entrapped and surprised into an enforced consent.

But this view of the matter, though not at all very improbable at first sight, is, upon the whole, rather too ingenious and refined. And there are circumstances in the history, and features in the character of Herod, which would incline us to the belief that he was not concerned in any previous arrangement,—that the plot, if there was a plot, was formed between the mother and daughter, without his knowledge,—that the atrocious proposal did

come upon him abruptly and unexpectedly, and that he really was "exceeding sorry." This appears likely from the respect and attachment which we know that Herod previously felt towards the Baptist, as well as from the remorse of which, it is said, he afterwards gave proof.

The truth is, this man was not by nature blood-thirsty. Weakness, rather than violence, was very much the characteristic of his mind. He was not prepared to adopt extreme measures; on the contrary, he was prone to try temporizing expedients, and to seek the accomplishment of his ends by craft and compromise, rather than by force.

Other historians give him this character. They do not charge him with a deliberate and systematic love of cruelty, but rather with being sly and subtle, cool, crafty, and designing. He was ambitious, but he had not learned to lay aside all restraints. He was not one of those who could deliberately "wade through slaughter to a throne;" on the contrary, he contrived to maintain a decent character for just clemency and moderation. Violence, cruelty, and bloodshed, were therefore, on the whole, against his natural temper; and hence we may well suppose, that, when he was betrayed into the temptation of committing crime, he might show much indecision and reluctance. We may give him credit for a struggle in his own mind, and for pain and sorrow in yielding. Such is the representation given of this prince in the uninspired histories of the times.

And such he appears in the Bible. There is not much told of him there, but the little that is told agrees with the view of his character elsewhere given, and exhibits

him as a man in some respects well disposed, yet too selfish and too timid to be consistent;—with some good principles, yet too much the slave of passion and the world, to give them fair play and scope; not firm enough to do right, yet not bold and bad enough unscrupulously to do wrong;—neither decidedly good nor decidedly wicked; neither resolutely honest nor a reckless ruffian; but hampered and entangled between good feelings, desires, and resolutions, on the one hand, and evil inclinations and evil counsellors on the other. If he could have got rid of the last, he might have been a better man. If he could even have got rid of the first, he would have been a happier, or at least an easier, man. As it was, he was perpetually miserable;—tossed and bandied to and fro between his sins and his scruples, doing things by halves, and settling the controversy of conscience with temptation by a sort of evasive, underhand compromise, which left as much room as ever for a new struggle, a new assault, and a new defeat. Ever as he was disposed to do right, some supposed necessity of doing wrong interfered; and yet, ever when the wrong was done, there was reluctance at the time, and regret and remorse afterwards. He was always stopping short too soon either way, having not enough of principle to keep him steady in duty, and yet too much to let him go on contentedly in crime.

Hence that appearance of cunning which procured for him from our Lord the name of "fox" (Luke xiii. 32); and hence, too, that wavering and vacillating inconsistency which marked his treatment both of the Baptist and of the Saviour.

Thus, on the one hand, it is quite plain that he had a high opinion of both. For, as to the Baptist, we read that Herod much esteemed him, admitted him to his court, made him almost a favourite and personal friend;—listened to him respectfully, treated him with all honour, and even in many things gladly followed his counsel (Mark vi. 20). Again, as to our Lord, we are told that, when Herod heard of his fame and his wonderful works, he desired to see him;—out of curiosity, perhaps, or to atone for the violence done to the Baptist by some attention to his successor and representative (Luke ix. 9). Nor did this desire pass away: for, when Jesus was brought before Herod for trial, we are told (Luke xxiii. 8) that the prince rejoiced; having now for a long time been anxious to see this wonderful prophet, in the hope of seeing some miracle done by him.

It is quite evident, therefore, that, to a certain extent, Herod had a regard for religion and its ministers. Nay, it seems as if at times, under the Baptist's ministry, on which he waited, he had been really under the influence of religious impressions, both sincere and deep. He "feared John, knowing him to be a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly" (Mark vi. 20). He esteemed the man, and reverenced the prophet; hearing him gladly, and complying with his instructions, so long as these did not interfere too painfully with his worldly inclinations. At first, accordingly, when there was nothing to stir up an opposition between his religious principles and his ruling passion—the fire within being smothered,

the storm lulled into a calm, Heaven seeming to smile propitious and approving—the attentive convert and docile pupil bade fair to turn out an exemplary saint. The prince seemed to be living in peace and friendship with the prophet, and even with the prophet's Lord.

But touch his secret sore too boldly, and the peace is broken, the friendship gone. Let temptation kindle again his favourite lust—his cherished desire; let the world make its demand openly, and religion as openly interpose her authority; let the controversy be brought to a single point, and the call be made upon him in a single definite particular to deny himself and mortify the flesh;—then comes the struggle; and then is seen the weakness of merely natural impressions of religion. The prince, who appeared to have started so well, in an unlucky hour is tempted to sin. The Baptist fearlessly remonstrates and reproves: "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife" (Mark vi. 18). Then is the king distracted between the flatteries of the world's easy morals on the one hand, and the unaccommodating and uncompromising claims of rigid religion on the other.

Need we say which prevailed? The king yielded to his unlawful passion; but not without many apologies to himself, and many prudent resolutions. He was sorry, "exceeding sorry;" not perhaps, as one says, "for his sin against God's law, but yet for the severity of God's law against his sin." He was sorry that the temptation was so strong, and his friend so strict; but then he felt as if he could not resist the temptation, as if indeed he

could scarcely be fairly expected or required to resist it. And though, in this one instance, he could not go along with those high and stern principles,—which might suit an austere and solitary recluse, but could not well be acted upon in the world, and amid the trials of a court, —still this single, almost unavoidable deviation from such counsels, would not hinder him from paying all respect in general to the teaching of his friend.

So he might reason. Alas! he little thought how soon this one instance of opposition to good advice would lead on even to the murder of the adviser. O! if he could but have foreseen that this one indulgence, in the world's eye so venial, would issue, by an almost necessary and inevitable sequence, in falsehood, treachery, and blood! But once do wrong, and who shall dare to say where the wrong will end? Doubtless Herod felt that, though he might occasionally transgress the too strict rule of his religious counsellor, he never could be prevailed upon to disavow religion itself, or its minister. He little knew how instantly and irresistibly the consciousness of guilt would work a change in his sentiments towards the reprover of that guilt. Even at the time, in the very act of sin, the thought of the holy man's disapprobation, and still more the conviction of conscience that the holy man spoke truth, must have poisoned the pleasure of his unhallowed and incestuous passion. And afterwards how must he have felt? Dissatisfied, restless, impatient,—he could scarcely tell why or with whom,—angry with himself and with all around, he could no longer gladly listen to the voice of him whose presence was a reproof,—whose

very smile of kindness and benignity could not but cut him to the heart.

In these circumstances, he would fain have silenced this too faithful witness against his sin, at once and effectually, and for ever. But he feared John. The prophet had still too great a hold on his mind, and he had too many religious feelings and scruples, to venture on so bold an act of violence; and so he hesitated between his dislike of the reproof and his reverence for the reprover. And this perplexing indecision in his own mind was increased by opposing applications from without. His offended and indignant partner instigated him to direct outrage. His people, again, acknowledged John to be a prophet. Weak, therefore, and irresolute, he had recourse to the usual expedient of weakness,—he adopted a middle course. He did John no personal violence, but kept him in prison (Mark vi. 17). He put religion and its strenuous assertor quietly, and, as he might think, quite allowably, out of the way. Thus he so contrived the matter, that he shall neither be vainly tormented by officious remonstrances on the one hand, nor yet, on the other hand, incur the guilt and odium of avowed and actual hostility to the word and prophet of the Lord. Such, in the first instance, is his treatment of the Baptist.

Precisely similar is the temper displayed in his treatment of our Lord, and that on two different occasions.

The first of these is recorded in the Gospel of Luke, where we read that once, in Galilee, there came certain of the Pharisees, saying to Jesus, "Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee. And he said

unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected" (Luke xiii. 31, 32). It is plain, from our Lord's answer being addressed to Herod, that he suspected that prince to be at the bottom of the message;—and the case seems to have been this: The Pharisees, in their usual enmity against Christ, had applied to Herod to procure his interference against him. Herod, on the other hand, had scruples. He was willing enough to oblige the Pharisees, so as to be on good terms with these convenient apologists and absolvers of his worldly frailties. He would gladly have rid himself and them of another troublesome and officious reprover, who had come to take the place of the beheaded John. But then he felt too much about his former violence to the Baptist. The memory of that crime lay heavy on his conscience; so heavy as to make him dread, in the Lord Jesus, his injured friend risen to reproach him. What a striking instance this, as we may note in passing, of the power of conscience!—the guilty man has rid himself of one accuser, only to be startled by the rising up of another! Herod, then, would not again be so rash; and, besides, he still feared the people, who honoured Jesus even more than they had honoured John. So once more he is in a dilemma, and once more he tried a middle course,—authorizing the Pharisees to convey to this new teacher of righteousness an indirect hint, which may have the effect of banishing him from his territories. This seems to have been his cunning device and stratagem, in allusion to which Jesus denounces him as "that fox."

And thus sinners still think slily to get the better of their God. Without committing themselves by open hostility, they would contrive, by a sort of by-play or side-wind, to put away his word of warning and reproof.

The second occasion of Herod's having to deal with Jesus, was when Pilate sent Jesus to him to be tried. And now Herod hopes, at last, to gratify his vain curiosity, and see some specimen of the miracles of which he has heard so much: "And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing" (Luke xxiii. 8, 9). Herod is provoked by the Saviour's silence, and feels it as a reproof of his former crime. The Jewish authorities, meanwhile, loudly and clamorously reiterate their accusations: "The chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him" (Luke xxiii. 10). What is now the judge's course? Plainly either to condemn or to acquit the prisoner,—to declare him guilty, and worthy of death, or innocent, and therefore free. But mark the weakness of the man! Either of these measures would be too decided for him. He does not venture to condemn, neither will he at once absolve. So he gratifies the Pharisees and vents his own impotent resentment, by an act of wanton, gratuitous, and unjustifiable barbarity, —he exposes his victim, still uncondemned, to the insults of the soldiery, and then sends him again to Pilate;—

thus losing all the calm uprightness of the judge in the petty and jealous insolence of the tyrant: "And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate" (Luke xxiii. 11).

Such was the character of this monarch. Now, with this character it is perfectly consistent that, on the occasion of the demand made for the Baptist's head, he should have been "exceeding sorry." No wonder, indeed, that by such a demand, at such a time, on such a day of festal joy, he should have been shocked, startled, horror-struck. The man whom but lately he had welcomed as his friend, admitted to his family, and intrusted with his confidence; to whom he had pledged his hand in fellowship, and his heart too, we may almost say, in respectful love; from whose lips he had heard words of wisdom, and tenderness, and kind reproof;—this man of God he was now called upon to sacrifice in the light frivolity of a dance. No wonder he hesitated and scrupled, and was "exceeding sorry." But what did his sorrow, however sincere, avail him? Did it arrest him in his evil course? Did it prevent the crime? He looked about for some way of escape. Fain would he have found some compromise to satisfy his friends and soothe his conscience, that he might evade the necessity of a definite and decided step. But no ready expedient occurred. Still he hesitated, and was "exceeding sorry." But a supposed necessity of compliance prevailed: "For his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not," he thought he could not, "reject her."

Let us now endeavour, having some knowledge of Herod's character, and some sympathy and pity for his weakness, to measure the force of the strong compulsion which he pleads, and estimate the worth of his sorrow, "exceeding sorry" as he was.

"For his oath's sake."—Like the Jew of the poet, he pleads an oath in justification of his cruelty. He has an oath in heaven; would you have him lay perjury to his soul? True, he has been entrapped. In his light and playful mood of joy, he promised, and even swore, to grant the pleasing dancer's request; expecting, probably, that he would have to give some costly bauble to gratify her gay and giddy vanity, of which her dancing so publicly, against all custom and the modesty of her sex, was a scandalous proof and instance. He little dreamed of so bloody a demand upon his faith. Still that faith must be kept; he has promised, and he must redeem his promise; he has sworn, and he must perform his vow. Alas, infatuated man! and is it possible he can really have believed that Heaven would register such an oath, or sanction, far less require, such a fulfilment of it? Did he not know that it is impossible for man to bind himself to sin, being previously bound by God against it? To keep a rash and unlawful vow is surely worse than to break it; for it cannot cancel the guilt of having made it at first, and it does but add to the sin of a hasty word the heavier guilt of a deliberate criminal deed. But, in fact, Herod could not think himself religiously obliged to crime. Rather, now that his eyes were opened, was he not religiously obliged to stop short and retrace his steps? The very

sorrow which he felt,—was it not a proof that it could not be the will of God that he should fulfil his engagement? It was a warning against it. It was as if the angel of the Lord stood in the way with drawn sword to oppose him, as he stood in the way to oppose Balaam of old. Balaam, too, was going to fulfil a promise,—to curse Israel. But when the angel stood aside and suffered him to go on—was it in approval of his keeping such a promise? Was it not in displeasure and in wrath—abandoning the covetous prophet to his own heart's lust? The truth is, it was not really God that the prince thought of as demanding the fulfilment of his vow, but man. He scrupled about breaking his sworn promise and plighted word to a mere mortal. Alas! his scruple was not about breaking any obligation under which he might lie to God! He had sworn to the lewd minion and minister of his pleasure, and he could not in honour, or in conscience, draw back. Innocent blood must be shed,—the holy man must fall.

And was this, then, the poor punctilio, the paltry point of honour, to which a saint and servant of the Most High must be sacrificed? He was sorry he had committed himself,—deeply and bitterly did he regret the pledge and promise he had given. O that he had never seen that day,—never sat down at that fatal entertainment,—never tasted the intoxicating cup of the siren's flattery and fondness! He had begun in sport; alas! now it was too serious earnest. He had been seduced by a mask of painted smiles; alas! now the mask falls off, and all the devil appears. He had been lulled into a soothing slumber

by the soft blandishments of love and joy; he little dreamed of so terrible an awakening. It was pleasure he sought; he little reckoned on the black and bloody villany that was to follow in her train. Would that he had resisted at first,—that he had taken the prophet's advice! But now he is entangled, involved, committed too far—it is too late: "For his oath's sake"—

"And for their sakes which sat with him."—He had publicly sworn, and would be publicly taunted and upbraided, if he did not perform his oath. All his court would cry shame on him. It would be of no use to explain to them his reasons for hesitating. They could not understand his scruples. They would give him no credit for sincerity. After all he had sacrificed, they could not believe him in earnest in hesitating to sacrifice a little more; for in their estimation it was no great matter, after all, that was demanded,—only the obscure and worthless life of a troublesome captive! What was this, that it should be suffered to disturb the festivity of the scene, or break the harmony that prevailed? The king had acted royally in the munificent pledge he gave; the festive hall rung with applause of his princely liberality; and was he now, from pretended delicacy of conscience, to fail in redeeming it?

It was too late for him, after all that had passed, to plead religious or conscientious reasons,—these had long ago been overborne. The courtiers well knew that if he had acted from such reasons, he never would have gone so far as he had already gone in his persecution of the Baptist; they could not therefore suppose that these were the reasons

which prevented him now from going just a little farther. His refusal would be placed to the account, not of principle, —none would give him credit for that,—but of falsehood, meanness, or cowardice; and he dared not incur such an imputation. He "was exceeding sorry; but for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her."

And these were the arguments which satisfied this man, who had once been almost persuaded to be John's disciple! He consented with reluctance, yet he felt himself compelled to consent. And what compelled him? A fanciful point of honour—a false feeling of shame. Alas! what a spectacle is here!—a man always sinning with regret, yet still always sinning; "exceeding sorry" to do wrong, yet in spite of his sorrow still always obliged to do it. What a specimen of the deceitfulness of sin! How plausibly it argues, so that the heart of man,—ay, even of a seemingly religious man,—shall be persuaded to acquiesce in its arguments! How skilfully and cunningly does it contrive to spread the toils and meshes of its net around him, so that he can see no possible way of escape!

And the marvel is, it is but a cobweb net after all. A single vigorous effort of honest resolution would burst it and break it in ten thousand pieces. But the victim entangled is a weak, and half a willing captive. The heart involved in the deceitfulness of sin, is itself deceitful. Still unregenerate, unrenewed, and unsanctified,—untouched by the mercy, and unchanged by the Spirit of

God,—it has not taken part decidedly with the Lord and his Anointed. Some religion it may have,—a religion of scruples, and fears, and regrets, but not a religion of faith, —something of sorrow for sin, but not the godly sorrow that worketh true repentance.

Let none be deceived by such experience, or rest contented with such a religion as Herod's,—a religion of continual alternation between sin and sorrow. We know not what ultimately became of him. History tells us, that shortly after this period he lost his kingdom, and spent the latter years of his life in disgrace and solitude in the remote province of Spain. It is possible that the leisure of exile may have been blessed by God to work a salutary effect; and, amid the reflections of adversity, the long controversy carried on in his soul may have terminated in the decided victory of a spiritual faith over sense and sin. But certain it is, his religion, such as it was at this time, could never save him. It was but leading him on to ruin, and that by no flowery path, but over thorns and painful briers.

Oh! it is a sorrow most unprofitable and vain that men feel under the influence of mere natural regrets and relentings. It is but losing the present world without gaining anything of the next. It is but inflicting upon themselves needless, unprofitable pain; it is doing penance in vain. Better far would it be to get rid of the sorrow altogether, and then go on to sin. But as this they cannot do, would it not be better still to get rid of the sorrow by getting rid of the sin? And how is this to be done? Not by a system of half measures, or any delusive

compromise with the enemy,—not by a religion of impulse, or of alarm, or of mere instinctive sensibility; but by being "born again,—born of the Spirit,"—and then "working out your own salvation with fear and trembling, since it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." For "by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

Let us, then, come over wholly to the Lord's side. All on his part is full and free. There is no hesitation,—there are no half measures with him; but full and free forgiveness, full and free reconciliation, full and free expiation of guilt, and the full and free gift of the sanctifying Spirit. On our part, too, let there be the like fulness and freeness. Let God be all and in all. So shall we be preserved from those fluctuations between God and the world, those vicissitudes of compliance and compunction, which imbitter the life, and must torture the death, of him who, in the vain attempt to serve two masters, sins and is sorry; is "exceeding sorry," and yet goes on to sin.

VIII.

HEROD AN EXAMPLE OF "WORLDLY SORROW WORKING DEATH."

"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death."—2 Cor. vii. 10.
"And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her."—Mark vi. 26.

"The king was exceeding sorry;" such is the explanation —shall we say partly the excuse?—of Herod's conduct, suggested by the inspired historian. It is the very apology which he might have been disposed to offer for himself, or his friends might have offered for him; it is the sort of extenuating circumstance that he or they might have wished to be left on record, in connection with the narrative of so dark a deed. In consenting to it, "the king was exceeding sorry." Such sensibility seems, so far as it goes, to be rather creditable than otherwise; indicating a certain tenderness of feeling, which, in one view of it, looks well in contrast with the remorseless and cruel levity of the fair dancer and her parent, making sport, amid their revelry, of that venerable and holy head. But then how far did this sensibility of Herod's go? Of what avail was his exceeding sorrow? It did not save the prophet's life,—would it save the prince's soul or satisfy his conscience? Must it not, on the contrary, in another view of it, appear to be even an aggravation of his guilt, that, in the face of his exceeding sorrow, he went on to

commit the crime? At all events, this sorrow is nothing more than what is very commonly the accompaniment of sin, especially when the sinner has any natural or gracious emotions that must be got over before he gives in to the sin.

For in fact sin is usually, or rather invariably, more or less a cause of sorrow, either beforehand, or at the time, or afterwards. Beforehand, there is reluctance and hesitation; at the time, a sharp pang of sudden shame, or undefined uneasiness and alarm; and afterwards, regret and remorse. The sorrow beforehand is what chiefly tests the state of the sinner's heart, and affords the measure of his criminality. Of such sorrow there may be in some cases little or none; as where the hurry of a hasty temptation, or the violence of passion, carries a man on with scarce a moment for reflection; or where long and hackneyed familiarity with vice has deadened all the feelings. But between such cases there lies a sort of middle or debatable ground, on which, with more of deliberation than in the one case, and less of obduracy than in the other, the man solicited to sin sways to and fro before he falls; and it is the pain of such oscillation of mind—the sorrow of this weak or wicked suspense ere the blow is struck—that the example of Herod illustrates.

Now the sorrow in question may arise out of either of two contingencies; either, first, when sin comes to disturb a religious profession; or, secondly, when religion comes to disturb a course of continuance in sin.

I. The first of these occasions on which this sorrow

is apt to be felt, is when sin comes to disturb a decent and perhaps serious profession of religion. This was Herod's case with reference to the first great crime which he committed, in taking to himself Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. Until he was thus tempted, and fell a victim to the temptation, all apparently might be going on well with him, as the follower and friend of the Baptist. He respected that holy man, waited on his ministry, admitted him to his intimacy, complied with his counsels, and had the reputation, perhaps, of being an earnest and consistent disciple. Doubtless, when he found that he could no longer continue on the same terms with his spiritual adviser, but must reject his too faithful advice, he was "exceeding sorry." His sorrow, however, did not hinder his sinning.

Is the case uncommon? May it not once have been —may it not still at this very moment be—your own? You are willing, nay, forward, to adopt a profession of godliness; and, if not quite prepared to go all lengths, yet up to a certain point you are ready to go hand and heart along with the godly. It is not that you are consciously insincere. You have received deep impressions; you are anxious to maintain a Christian character; you hear the word with joy; you do many things to prove your earnestness and zeal; you delight not a little in services of piety, works of faith, and labours of love. It is true, you are not yet altogether such as Paul, were he speaking to you as he did to Agrippa, might wish you to be—"Such," he would say, "as I am, except these bonds;" you are only almost persuaded to be such.

There is a hidden reserve and secret guile in your spirit; and a sort of suspicion may visit others, and even haunt yourself, that there might be some sacrifice required of you,—some renunciation of self-indulgence, or some act of self-denial, to which you might not be quite able to consent. Still, so long as a peremptory and painful decision, in a particular instance, is not actually forced upon you, the symptoms of your general unsteadfastness in the covenant of God may not be very apparent, and the root of bitterness may not spring up to trouble you.

But let an emergency occur,—let there be some sin so besetting you that your religious principle can remain quiet and tolerant no longer;—then comes the "tug of war," the strife and inward controversy. Conscience, but now smooth and satisfied, becomes agitated and uneasy. Inclination, on the other hand, is importunate, and there is a strong necessity pressing upon you. Everything like truce or compromise between the contending powers is, for the time at least, at an end. The customary terms of good understanding are broken. It is "war to the knife" now; and you are sorry for it,—"exceeding sorry."

Christian! professing Christian! and thou especially whose profession of serious godliness is yet fresh and recent! consider, with reference to such experience as this—"consider your ways." Call to mind the first marked step you have been tempted to take, since you seriously assumed the Christian character and name, in the direction of self-indulgence or worldly conformity. You have been advancing, as you flattered yourself,

steadily and happily, finding "Wisdom's ways ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace;" nor has any anticipation of the embarrassment of a doubtful choice marred the serenity of your heavenly fellowship. All at once a question is started bearing upon your practical conduct, —your walk before God in the world. A proposal is made that you should enter into a certain society, or engage in a certain pursuit, or consent to a certain alliance, of which the lawfulness, or at least the Christian expediency, may not be altogether so clear as you would wish. There may be a secret leaning perhaps in your own heart towards compliance; or, if not, the very absence of it may be a snare, making compliance look all the more like a duty. And there may be much friendly advice, and even perhaps parental authority, on the same side. But, on the other hand, there is a scruple; and there is the divine warning sounded in your ears— "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin;" "He that doubteth is condemned if he eat;" "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth;" "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." Such full persuasion, in the instance on hand, you are very far from having; and the want of it distresses you, and makes you "exceeding sorry." Still much is to be said in favour of concession; there are many arguments against an unreasonable and impracticable degree of strictness; there are various considerations of plausible worldly policy and propriety to justify or excuse the step; time presses; the matter is urgent; people all around are waiting for your decision; and what can you

do? At least you may cast another look on what you are thus solicited to sanction. You look and linger; you linger and begin again to long. Your hand is stretched out; your feet are about to move.

Here, however, once more, at the very critical moment, an arrest is laid upon you,—a voice from within is heard; from on high there flashes upon you the eye of a frowning God,—an angry Father; and the clear, emphatic word of warning, "It is not lawful for thee," rings in your ears, as it rung in the ears of Herod. You are startled,—you stop short,—your special pleading is laid bare,—your duty is clear. Thus arrested, you draw back, and you seem to be safe, and to breathe freely.

And so you might be safe, were it not that, even in the very act of stopping short, you are "sorry." Thankful, doubtless, for your escape,—glad of your seasonable deliverance, coming as it did just in time, and no more than in time,—contented to acquiesce in the rejection of the offered worldly boon or worldly pleasure, and satisfied that it must be so,—you yet at bottom cannot help being, if not "exceeding sorry," yet at least a little, a very little sorry, that it should be so.

And of this natural sorrow the tempter knows right well how to make the most. Returning, as opportunity serves, to the assault, he plies you with still more subtle arguments than before. It is really so small an affair, after all—so trifling a question; why make so much of it? It is but one little liberty; and when it is over, and you have done with it, all will be well. In this one particular, Herod cannot meet the views and wishes

of the Baptist. He is sorry for it,—"exceeding sorry;" but, situated as he is, how can he follow such a rigid rule as his spiritual counsellor would lay down? How should he be expected to do so? This John, a native of the wilderness, fed on wild food and clothed with coarsest raiment, cannot know the ways of kings and kings' courts. As a well-meaning man, a powerful preacher of righteousness, a faithful and friendly adviser, he is no doubt entitled to esteem; and Herod has by no means ceased to esteem him, though in one solitary point of private honour or public policy he cannot absolutely defer to him. For once, he must set aside the stern code of heavenly morality for the less impracticable maxims of worldly interest and worldly views of the sort of virtue it is reasonable to expect in kings' houses: but he will not, on that account, think the less highly, but rather the more, of the prophet, whose honest admonition he is only sorry he cannot, in this instance, regard; he will not wait the less punctually, or with the less docility, on his ministrations; nor will he welcome him less cordially to his house, his table, and his closet.

So Herod might think; and so may you, when "exceeding sorry," as you may be, to go against the misgivings of conscience, and what you cannot help suspecting may be the dictates of the Divine Word, you resolve, nevertheless, to go. You may intend and expect that your general reverence for the authority of that Word is to continue uncompromised, and your general conscientiousness unimpaired. The solitary exception is to confirm rather than invalidate the otherwise universal rule.

Alas for the infatuation of such a hope! You said you would be none the worse for your one compliance. It was to be a single instance, and in all other respects you were to be as devout and as scrupulously holy as ever. But have you, in fact, found it so? Have you ever, in such circumstances, been able to realize your anticipation? After a concession or compromise like what we have been describing, have you lived as near to God as before? or walked as closely with him? or prayed to him as fervently? or rejoiced as lovingly in the light of his countenance, and the blessed peace of conscious reconciliation, divine fellowship, and heavenly hope? Ah, no! An inward blight has come over you; a withering coldness and callousness of heart oppresses you. Herod could never again be on the same terms as before with the Baptist, or with the Baptist's ministry. He could not, with clear and calm eye, look John in the face; and never again could he hear him gladly. With hanging head, averted ear, and sullen heart, he must have listened ever after to his friendly voice. And on you too, in the like case, a similar spell falls. Singleness of eye is gone, and with it all simplicity of faith and frank cordiality of love. The living spirit of your religion has passed away; a dead and weary weight of forced formality remains. You feel this, and complain of it, and mourn over it,—though too frequently, alas! without searching out the cause! You have a vague sense of dreariness and undefined dissatisfaction. You are "exceeding sorry," you often know not why.

Nor is this all. As you have not kept your promise

to yourself, so the tempter does not keep his promise to you. You said you would be as godly as ever, upon the whole, in spite of your one doubtful step: he said he would be as forbearing as ever, and would take no advantage of that step to draw you farther on. You were not to tempt God any more by any further tampering with his authority: Satan was not to tempt or trouble you any more by any further working on your weakness. Such was the sort of tacit understanding on both sides.

But have you kept your part of the agreement? and if not, can you reasonably expect the adversary to keep his? Can you wonder if, seeing you unfaithful to yourself, and to your God, he should be unfaithful to you? If you were able to fulfil your purpose, to realize all your intended uprightness of walk with God, and be as spiritually-minded and as tender-hearted as you thought that, notwithstanding your slight conformity to the world, you might still continue to be; then Satan might not venture to break his truce with you,—he might shrink from assailing you again. But perceiving you to be as unstable as you are unhappy,—as feeble and silly as you are "exceeding sorry,"—it is too much to think that he should forego so attractive an opportunity, let slip so easy a prey, and continue to leave you alone.

Back, therefore, he comes to you, urging all his old pleas, and this new one in addition, that you have already so far committed yourself as to make it vain for you to attempt either to stay or to change your course. 'See,' he cries, 'you have broken with that holy man and his holy teaching, beyond the hope of any accommodation.

You have found it so. Why, then, stand upon scruples and ceremonies any longer? You have made up your mind, in a right kingly manner, to brave this spiritual tyrant, and set at defiance his intrusive and impertinent interference with your domestic affairs, and the arrangements of your court and kingdom. You have shown, so far, a proper spirit;—you have asserted your independence and freedom; you have proved to this proud Mentor that he is not to dictate to you in everything. But do you not feel that, so long as you suffer him to live and be at large, you have no full confidence, no unembarrassed freedom, in the way which you have chosen? He may not now be allowed to preach to you so often as before. He may be silent when he finds his remonstrance unheeded. But he is still there; and his very presence is a restraint. The mere glance of his eye is a drawback on the pleasure you should be enjoying. Come, have him disposed of somehow—anyhow; and, without further unmanly temporizing, give free scope to what your heart is set on.'

So we may conceive of the tempter pleading with his now scarce-resisting victim. And "the king is exceeding sorry;"—sorry to be called upon to take a new step in the direction against which the convictions of his conscience and the affections of his heart equally protest. Must he, then, give up this man of God, whom he has in former days heard so gladly? To his death, indeed, even yet he cannot bring himself to consent. But a middle course may be tried. Let him be cast into prison, and, on the principle of "out of sight out of mind," the king may hope that he will be less sorry, less "exceeding

sorry," as he now finally settles down, unrebuked and unadmonished, into a customary and unreflecting course and routine of sin.

Thus also, in your case, O backsliding soul! your sorrow in sinning may force you at last to the expedient of ridding yourself of what you take to be the cause of it—which is not of course, in your view, your sin, but the troublesome monitor that reproves it. The struggle may be more or less protracted and severe; but, as it goes on, the issue may be too surely foreseen. You reckon without warrant, when you trust the tempter's fair promises of forbearance. His favourite plea of 'But once' is a mere blind and snare: soon it will be 'Once more, only once more;' and again it will be 'Once more;' and still always—but once. The tide of encroaching ocean may be stemmed sooner, and turned back more easily, than his advances,—when, planting his foot upon one concession, he lifts his never-satisfied, never-ceasing demand for another, and another, until all is gained.

And if there be any form or fashion of religious profession, or any feeling of religious principle, that stands out in silent grief against the successive compromises that are thus claimed; if there be but so much of a remaining scruple of conscience and reverential awe of God and his Word, as to make the poor yielding soul sorry, "exceeding sorry," every time it yields,—even such a measure of godliness is more than can long be tolerated. There is a growing urgency in the demand to have the pertinacious reprover still more effectually silenced and set aside.

True, it may be too much, as yet, to require that you

should actually put him to death. To the absolute and final extinction of your religious character, such as it is, you can scarcely consent.

But a prison may be found for it,—a cold and dreary cell of formalism,—a dull, icy dungeon of foul, pharisaical, and antinomian hypocrisy; where the word of God's law and gospel may be kept in safe custody apart,—far enough away from the palace, with its council-chamber and banquet-hall,—from the world, with its plans and pleasures: so that, like King Herod, relieved of the Baptist's presence, the worldly Christian, chaining his Christianity out of sight and out of hearing, may abandon himself at last to his worldly-mindedness; without being so sorry, so "exceeding sorry," as, in more puling and effeminate days, when, like the frightened schoolboy,

> "Still as he ran he look'd behind;
> He heard a voice in every wind,
> And snatch'd a fearful joy."

Such is the kind of sorrow apt to arise on the occasion of sin coming to disturb a decent or serious profession of godliness; and such its practical value.

II. But there is another occasion of sorrow,—when religion, or godliness, returns the compliment, as it were, and comes to disturb a course of continuance in sin. Let it be supposed that the process which you have been hitherto trying, for silencing conscience and getting ease in sin, has been, on the whole, rather successful. Your experiment of confining, imprisoning, and chaining your religion, has turned out tolerably well. You have now

freedom and enlargement in your worldly conformity. Weak scruples and fond fancies trouble you no longer. Your unfashionable timidity, your ridiculous singularity, the sigh of regret, the blush of shame,—all have been got over; and with a smile, or a jest, you can venture boldly on the ice. No frown of an offended God, no warning of any pious friend, no voice of a wounded conscience, haunts you now. You can talk as familiarly as your neighbours of the world's vanities and venial indulgences; and, contriving to keep at a distance, and in a dark unvisited corner of your mind, any religious scruples that might still give annoyance, you find tolerable security and comfort in the broad road along which you are following the multitude to do evil.

But it may happen, on an occasion, that you are abruptly asked to go a great deal farther than you ever dreamed of. A sudden demand is made upon you for a decision in an entirely new case, such as cannot but bring back "your banished" to your memory. A proposal is made to you, so much beyond all that you have as yet consented to in daring profanity and crime, that your conscientious scruples and religious principles are again stung into reviving sensitiveness. The miserable battle and intestine feud of soul is resumed, and again you are sorry—"exceeding sorry."

This was Herod's case in his last and crowning wickedness. He has got over the Baptist's opposition to his incestuous marriage; he is living quietly in his sinful indulgence, and has even a kind of peace in it. He can enjoy the revelry of the banquet and the ball; there

being no officious intermeddler to trouble him with unseasonable remonstrances, and make him sorry or afraid. John is safe in prison; as well treated as his insolent and unaccommodating temper will admit of,—certainly as well as, after all that has passed, he deserves or can expect. And the king has his own way, and is his own master. Why may not matters rest on this decent and decorous footing?

So Herod would have it. But not so the tempter: "Give me John the Baptist's head in a charger."

Horror-struck, the king staggers under the shock! So fiendish and blood-thirsty a cry, issuing from lips so fair and young, appals him! He is agitated in his whole frame. Fain would he live on at ease, forgetful of his old guide, monitor, and friend: but now all the past rushes in fierce and fiery flood upon his soul, with all its vivid recollections of past kindnesses and past wrongs; and the holy, placid countenance of the man of God is before his mind's eye once more, as in the days of old; and all this while the horrid words are ringing in his ears,—Give me his head! Little wonder that the king is "exceeding sorry!"

The instance may seem to be an extreme one, but it has many a parallel in the church and the world of every age. No downward career of declension or apostasy has ever been without circumstances and symptoms similar to those which we find in that of Herod. One feature in particular is invariably to be observed, and it is a most insidious and disastrous one: Always, now and then, an interval occurs—a pause, a break, a sort of rest or breath-

ing-time—between one concession reluctantly extorted, and the demand of another awakening all the old reluctance again. For this strife with conscience is close and deadly, and the parties in the wrestling-match must have some space between the rounds. The tug and strain upon the moral nature—the spiritual constitution, the whole frame-work of the religious sensibilities and affections—is so intense, that were it not from time to time relaxed, and a season of comparative quiet allowed, the cord must break and the tempter's art be foiled. It is not his interest to have you always struggling and always "exceeding sorry." He has his landing-places on which, having dragged you so far down, he lets you have a little peace before again he shocks and startles you by another grasp to drag you down still farther.

Beware of these devil's landing-places, for they are most deceitful. They are the successive compromises which you are but too glad to make, as step by step you are led on in sin. Hardened profligates, confirmed and habitual drunkards, seared and sordid slaves of avarice and the world's gain, know these landing-places full well. There is not one of them who could not tell of stages at which, ceasing to be sorry for practices or indulgences now become familiar, he had some measure of a sort of ease, and even of contentment, till some new excess, into which he found himself fast falling, startled him from his drowsy quiet, roused his remorseful agonies once more, and made him again "exceeding sorry." And he can tell too how that second sorrow, like the first, was in due time overcome, and a second season of repose ensued, until

new and larger strides in the path of wickedness became inevitable; and, after weary alternations of angry tumult and false peace, the death-blow being at last given to whatever of God's word or voice within him could raise a feeble protest against his madness, he has been given over to a reprobate mind, to do without feeling those things which are not convenient.

Let the young man, entering on life's busy scene, beware of these false and fatal landing-places. Plunged into the tumult and temptations of a great city while yet fresh from the endearments of a holy home, you meet the first solicitations of evil with a comparatively pure conscience and a tender heart. Compliances are required of you which create uneasiness; you are expected to tolerate at least what but lately you would have rejected with utter loathing: you must, as you think, mix a little in doubtful society, and consent to some doubtful practices; you yield;—but you are "exceeding sorry." Soon, however, your sorrow wears away, and you are tranquil and unconcerned. You have come to an understanding with your religion on the one hand, and with the world's claims on the other. You cease to be shocked with what is so common in your circle; and, familiar with its little levities and liberties, you are no longer "exceeding sorry" when you occasionally conform to them. Thus far the tempter has gained the day; whatever ease or liberty you now experience, it is to him that you owe it; and you may be very sure that he will soon exact a reckoning. Accordingly, ere long, he has some new demand to make in the line of sinful compliance and conformity. Again you struggle,

as a bird in the net. Old memories of home, its joys, its prayers, its tears,—the yearnings of parental fondness,—the loving smiles of familiar faces,—holy thoughts of holy seasons,—all crowd around you; and you are sorry, "exceeding sorry." But again an extorted compromise purchases a precarious peace; until a new call of vanity or folly occasions a new resistance and a new surrender; and the end comes—alas! how speedily—ruined character, blighted prospects, and broken hearts.

Nor is it superfluous to say to the professing Christian, or even the true believer,—Beware of this particular artifice of the adversary. You are not ignorant of Satan's wiles and devices; and sad experience may have proved to you that this is among the very worst of them. It is the triumph of the deceitfulness of sin. What shipwrecks of faith and of a good conscience have been made on this sunken rock! With what subtlety has insidious habit contrived in this way to weave her chains of exquisite delicacy around the weak or willing or half-willing victims of her craft! You have the strongest reasons for venturing on a measure of doubtful, or more than doubtful propriety; and in venturing upon it, timidly and for once only, you have scruples, and are "exceeding sorry." Again, however, the strong reasons, or plausible excuses, are urged; again you venture on the compliance that is asked of you, and it is with fewer scruples and less exceeding sorrow than before. Soon the first landing-place is reached. The act of worldly conformity, from being occasional, has become customary; inward upbraiding ceases, and you are "exceeding sorry" no longer. It is the dark, deceitful

lull before the gathering storm. Presently you are solicited to advance another step in the direction in which you have begun to walk. You resist; but your resistance is met by a smile of derision or a scowl of defiance. You are at the mercy of circumstances which you cannot now control. You are committed to associates or accomplices from whom you cannot now draw back. You have contracted habits which you cannot shake off. Forward you are constrained to go—reluctantly, for you are "exceeding sorry;" but still forward you are carried, till another stage is gained and another respite granted. Thus on and on you go, unless specially and almost miraculously arrested by sovereign grace, sinning and sorrowing—sorrowing and yet sinning still. For when your sorrow for sin is of such a sort as we have been tracing, and is again and again overborne, what security can it afford against the "great transgression?" (Ps. xix. 13.) Or in what can the history of your religious walk be expected to end, but the ruin of hardened and final impenitence? You are ever struggling, but still ever surrendering: you sin and are sorry; you are "exceeding sorry,"—and yet go on to sin.

But, it may be asked, If this sorrow be thus practically inefficacious, wherein does its inefficacy consist? or how may it be distinguished from that sorrow which, being of a godly sort, "worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of?"

Two distinctive marks may be enough; and accordingly it is to be observed, that the sorrow in question has in it no true fear of God, and no just sense of sin.

There is in it no true fear of God; for in all this sorrow you regard God, if you regard him at all, as if he were such an one as yourselves—as if he were like an earthly friend, whom, if by any accident you happen to offend him, you may easily conciliate and appease by a few formal common-places of apologetic explanation. In making your way through a crowded street, you are compelled to elbow and jostle some one whom you respect. You pause for a moment to ask his pardon,—you did not intend to hurt,—you are "exceeding sorry;" but the pressure was so great! Your interest obliges you to take an unwonted and not quite warrantable liberty with one on whose personal regard and indulgence you think you can reckon. You explain the freedom which you have used or are about to use,—you are "exceeding sorry" that it should be necessary, but you know he will excuse you; and, after all, between friends is it not a trifle?

And if your sin were no more than such a liberty taken, or such a personal offence heedlessly given, in your intercourse with a being with whom you might use familiarity, and who, in his dealings with you, had to consult merely his personal predilections—then you might presume that he would excuse it too. But the Almighty God, the High and Holy One, is not to be thus regarded. He is the moral governor of moral agents; and in that capacity he must be considered as acting in his treatment of sin and of sinners. Were God divested of this high supremacy, as the ruler and the judge of all; were he at liberty—we speak with reverence—to deal with men as a private person deals with those who have personally wronged or

insulted him; then it might be conceivable that he should accept as easily as they are lightly uttered, the casual, off-hand apologies of his weak and wayward creatures. And is it not precisely because you do thus conceive of him, that you venture to trifle so recklessly with his authority, and to presume so confidently on his indulgence? You flatter yourselves that he will not severely visit your failings; and if he should chance to take offence for any reason at any neglect you seem to show, a little explanation will set all right. "You are exceeding sorry;" but you really meant no harm. He will make allowance for your infirmity, and accept, as a sufficient apology, the regret which you feel for thus offending him.

Offending him!—and who or what art thou, O sinner! worm of the earth! that thou shouldst stand on such a footing with thy God? Thinkest thou that thy sin, or thy sorrow either, can reach or affect Him, the King, dwelling in light inaccessible and full of glory, as if He were a man, dependent for his happiness or for his honour on thee? Alas! what presumption in us, sinful mortals, to conceive of the Holy One, or to treat with him, as we might conceive of and treat with a fellow-mortal whom we had happened to irritate or wrong! He is offended with us, we scarcely know or care to ask why,—unreasonably, we are apt to think, and somewhat capriciously; but a few words of concession, a few signs of self-abasement, will pacify his resentment, and win his toleration of our weakness! Even so an ignorant and wilful child misinterprets the cause of a father's just displeasure. He knows nothing of the parental authority, or of parental

discipline. He sees only that his father is angry, and fondly hopes that a few expressions of penitence and a few tears of sorrow will coax and persuade him into easy and indulgent good-humour. And you, O sinner! will deal thus with God,—as a froward child with a doting parent! And when his voice is raised to forbid, and his arm to threaten, and his angel stands to oppose you,—still, by humble apologies and professions of "exceeding sorrow," you will work upon his compassion, and win, if not his sanction, yet at least his tolerance and permission; so that if you may not yield to him, he shall yield to you, and standing aside, as the angel did when Balaam continued perverse, suffer you quietly to go your own way!

Nor in this kind of sorrow is there a just sense of sin. There cannot be; for a just sense of sin flows from a true fear of God. The feeling, accordingly, which such sorrow is apt to cherish, is that of regret as for a misfortune, not repentance as for a fault. There is a secret presumption that you are to be pitied rather than to be blamed; and instead of a profound sense of your guilt, and an acknowledgment of the heinousness of your offence and the justice of your condemnation, there is rather an impression that it would be an extreme measure of severity on the part of God, were he to withhold from you the indulgence which you need. Deeper feelings, doubtless, of poignant grief and remorse may wring your hearts, as more generous and gracious thoughts of God, and of his holiness and love, occasionally visit your minds. Smitten with admiration,

gratitude, and awe, you may have something like a real and longing wish that you could please God, and real and bitter disappointment because you cannot. But it is a calamity that distresses you, not a crime. It is your infirmity—your fate; but still not your fault! There may be sorrow when you sin; but it is the sorrow, not of self-condemnation, but of self-justification. There is no conviction in it,—no guileless confession,—no thorough conversion,—no gracious forgiveness.

True sorrow for sin implies a recognition of the sovereignty of God,—the sovereignty of his authority and the sovereignty of his grace; or, in other words, it implies your looking to the cross of Christ, and beholding there, as in a glass, the glory of God. Let the enlightening Spirit shine into your hearts, to give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; —then, at last, feeling the extent and reasonableness of his righteous claims over you, and the deep demerit of your opposition to his will, you stand before him naked and without excuse; "every mouth stopped," and every one of you "brought in guilty" at his bar: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest" (Ps. li. 4).

Thus, as lost sinners, appropriating and apprehending the full and free forgiveness dispensed through the blood of Christ, and sealed by his Holy Spirit, you receive mercy at the hands of God, not as a kind of indulgence on which you may indefinitely presume, but as a special and signal act of grace. You feel that he sets you free, once for all,

from all condemnation, and sends you forth as his redeemed and reconciled children; not to sin and be "exceeding sorry," but to be ever sorrowing after a godly sort, and so sorrowing as "to sin no more" (John v. 14; viii. 11).

IX.

HEROD AN EXAMPLE OF AN ALLEGED NECESSITY OF SINNING.

"And the king was sorry; nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her."—MATT. xiv. 9.
"And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her."—MARK vi. 26.

THERE is a world of sad meaning in the little word that qualifies the intimation of Herod's grief. "The king was exceeding sorry; yet—." He "was sorry; nevertheless—." The full half of all the sins of men on earth are committed in this very way,—with a feeling of sorrow and an excuse of necessity. One half of the sinners of mankind are in the very predicament of this poor king. They have a great deal of religion, but somehow they are always compelled to compromise it. They cannot help it; they are "exceeding sorry;" but yet—.

Alas for this treacherous "But yet!" How many good resolutions and good feelings does it arrest! How many admirable designs does it interrupt! How many plans for good, how many plans against evil does it stay or stop! How many excellent premises does it bring to a "lame and impotent conclusion!"

"But yet, Madam!
I do not like—But yet. It doth allay
The good precedent! Fie upon—But yet!
But yet—is as a jailer to bring forth
Some monstrous malefactor."

So the poet complains. And not less indignantly may the Christian moralize over this poor equivocator, "But yet;"—this shuffler between a frank affirmative, Yes, and a bold outspoken negative, No;—this halting, envious busy-body, that is ever coming between a man and his wishes;—paving the way to hell with good intentions, and blasting with the mildew of his hesitancy many a holy and heavenward aspiration.

Nevertheless even this same trimming waverer—"But yet"—may demand a hearing.

He has his reasons. The historian gives Herod all the benefit of them: "For his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her." These are surely strong enough reasons;—an oath in heaven and a pledge on earth. Is there not here the entanglement of a double obligation, on which God and man may equally insist?

Are the reasons valid? Such a question we need scarcely ask or answer. But are they alleged honestly, and in good faith? That is a more interesting inquiry. And, in dealing with it, we must distinguish between excuses of weakness and apologies for wilfulness.

I. Is it a case of weakness? Do you really find yourselves committed unawares? And is it in all sincerity that you pitifully urge the plea—You have gone too far to draw back? You would fain do so; but yet—.

Certainly you are entitled to sympathy; and none like-minded with the Saviour will treat your sad embarrassment with contempt. Far be it from a Christian coun-

sellor to make light of the delicacies and difficulties of your position. It may be proper, however, to ask you, in all tenderness, two questions deeply affecting your responsibility. In the first place, How came you into such a position? In the second place, What hinders your escape from it?

Thus, in the first place,—How came you into your present position, delicate and difficult as confessedly it may be? Your oath, you say, binds you, and your companions expect you, to sacrifice your godly principles and scruples, at least in this one instance, and to this precise extent. It is painful, and you are "exceeding sorry;" but you are doubly pledged to it,—before God and men.

You are pledged before God; there is your oath. Now, this may mean that you really have involved yourselves so deeply that a question of conscience or a scruple of religion is fairly and inevitably raised when you attempt to draw back. In that case the alternative before you is distressing indeed; and in the choice you have to make you are greatly to be pitied. The vow of Jephthah, however we may interpret it—whether as dooming his daughter to a sacrificial death, or as devoting her to a perpetual and sacred virginity—stands out in holy Scripture, written for our learning, as a solemn and awful beacon against all rash tampering with the name of God, or with the sanctity of a covenant with God. It is possible that you may have fallen into a similar snare,—at least in your own honest opinion of your case. But the far more probable supposition is, that what you mistake for a sacred pledging of yourselves in the sight of God, is really nothing

more than your being committed in your own opinion. You have formed a resolution, more or less deliberately; and it is a mortification of your self-esteem to find that you must alter your course.

And then you are pledged, not only in your own mind, but in the judgment or opinion of men. The pledge may be either express or virtual; but taking it at its lowest value, and in its loosest form, we must admit that the entanglement is sufficiently serious.

Have you experimentally arrived at the discovery, that wickedness makes a tool of weakness? Have you found that novices are always at the mercy of professed and practised proficients in crime? Have you learned that tutors in sin invariably become tyrants? and that they will not let you alone until they have constrained you to do their bidding?—For, thereafter, they may cast you aside as exhausted instruments, or worthless remnants, of their pleasure.

Truly you are to be pitied. But the question must be pressed upon you—How came you into a position so embarrassing? And it is not for the mere purpose of vexing you that we press this question, but for reasons of obvious practical importance.

The first of these reasons is, that you may apprehend and feel your guilt. For you may rely on it that your case will never be adequately treated so long as you consider yourselves, or are considered by others, to be the objects of pity merely, and not of blame. Certainly pity is not to be withheld; and, in any judgment which your fellow-men pronounce upon your conduct, the circum-

stances in which you may have been placed are to be taken into account. But there is a risk of your being fondled in the cradle of a spurious, sentimental sympathy, when it would be far better for you to be startled, were it even as by the alarum of judgment and the trump of doom.

This, indeed, is one of the peculiar dangers of these times in which we live. It may arise partly out of the influence of a false, infidel philosophy, which would make mind the mere development of matter, and moral character the mere result and product jointly of physical organization and of physical laws. Or, it may be partly owing to a reaction from the sanguinary severity of the old penal code, which assuredly dealt with offenders pitilessly enough. And partly also it may spring from a sort of conscientious feeling of self-condemnation, and the impression that, having done so little to prevent evil, society has but a doubtful right to punish it. One or other of these causes, or all of them combined, may account for the tendency to which we refer. Certain it is, however, that it is fast growing into a mischievous and fatal infatuation in the department of public morals and social order. Criminals are regarded as entitled to sympathy. And so they are;—no class of the community are more so. But practically, is it not coming to this, that to a large extent they are regarded simply as entitled to sympathy, and not as deserving also of blame? And a sickly, sentimental, feminine sensibility,—very far removed from the manly and Christian philanthropy that first groped its way into our jails and bridewells,—would treat the violator of all laws, human and divine, as a vic-

tim rather than a villain,—to be pitied rather than to be punished.

The contagion of this false feeling is but too likely to reach the private walks of life, and even the inner region of spiritual experience. There, also, the idea is apt to prevail, that conformity to the world is the consequence of circumstances such as make it almost unavoidable. Under this impression, you may be mourning over your declension from your first love, and complaining of it to others on whose friendship and fellow-feeling you think you have a claim. You spread out your difficulties, and open up the hidden distresses of your souls. Your want of comfortable assurance and living joy, in your fellowship with God; the constant intrusion of the world and the world's cares; the unfixedness of your thoughts in devotion, and the secularity of your hearts; the little hold you have of the unseen and eternal state, and the little hold it has of you; the immersion of your minds in the drudgery of daily toil, or in the necessary calls of social courtesy and kindness; and, as the effect of all this, the feebleness of your faith and the languor of your love;—such evils in your spiritual condition you pour into the ear of pious friendship, with broken voice and bitter tears, looking, all the while, for the earnest and intelligent sympathy of brotherly love.

And God forbid that you should want this sympathy: tenderly must your case be treated. But let it be treated truthfully too. Come, we say to you, rouse yourselves, and quit you like men. Get rid of the imbecility of a mere appeal to pity. Look boldly at the actual state of

the case. Consider how you have come to be so involved and committed as you now are. Realize your full responsibility. Believe that you are not the sport of chance and victims of fate. No. You are not passively moulded into a character that is indelible; nor are you brought by any irresistible necessity into a condition that is irremediable. It is your sin, as well as your sorrow, that you have come into this state; and the first step towards your being relieved is, that "your sin must find you out."

The other reason, accordingly, for insisting on this inquiry is, that being convinced of guilt, you may not despair of recovery. For there is, perhaps, no more dangerous influence abroad, so far as personal effort is concerned, than that of a sort of covert and incipient fatalism. The listless impression of utter helplessness that creeps into the soul, when folly or excess has contrived to cast its lethargic spell over you, is like the stupor that steals upon the senses of the benumbed traveller, as, weary and wayworn amid the northern ice, he yields to the seduction of an insidious slumber. It is real kindness to break, however painfully, that sleep of death.

Hence our urgency in pressing home the question,—How came you into a predicament so painful? Arouse yourselves to a firm and strong grasp of the entanglements that beset you. To bewail them as misfortunes merely, is to indulge the mere fretfulness of a child. Take a manlier view of them. Deal with them as sins; and deal with yourselves as sinners. And look well into

the source of your sin,—into its very fountain-head and spring. It is idle to throw the blame on circumstances or companions. You are yourselves the guilty parties. And the very first thing you have to do, is not only to criminate and condemn yourselves, but to investigate, to its utmost depth, both the cause of your criminality and the ground of your condemnation.

This was what David did, when, abandoning all refuges of lies and all expedients of self-justification, he "acknowledged his sin unto the Lord," feeling both its offensiveness in the sight of God and its just liability to wrath; and then, tracing it up to its bitter source, cried out in his godly sorrow, "I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm li. 5–10).

But, in the second place, besides asking how came you into your present embarrassment, we must ask also, What really hinders your escape from it? Your vow, you say, and the right which your companions have over you: "For his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him."

Assuming still that yours is a case of weakness rather than of wilfulness, we ask you to consider the real value and force of these excuses. To what do they amount? Your vow, your oath,—what is that but a feeling of false pride? The opinion or expectation of your fellow-men,—what is that but a feeling of false shame?

False pride! false shame!—and are these, after all,

the giant forms and fantasies that stand forth to oppose you when you would retrace your steps, and recover yourselves? And what strength is there in them, when it is a prophet's head that you are required to sacrifice? To what a height must the infatuation of self-deception have come, if a conviction like this can be seriously entertained!

And after all, even at the last hour, might not Herod have frankly owned a fault in himself, and fearlessly disowned the fellowship of those "who sat at meat with him?" Had he summoned up courage enough to be abased under the judgment of God, and to defy the judgment of men,—to abandon his false pride in the presence of God, and to overcome his false shame in the presence of men; to say to his God, "I have sinned against thee, thee only;" and to say to his fellow-men, "What have I to do with you?"—the night, so dark and bloody, might have become to him ere it closed the dawn of a bright and blessed day. John, out of his prison, would have preached repentance to the humbled monarch as freely and fully as ever he preached it to the multitudes in the wilderness. Herod might have heard of the Lamb of God that taketh away sin; and before the morning broke, had he preferred the living voice to the lifeless head of his injured friend, there might have been joy over him in heaven among the angels of God, as over one more sinner repenting; and on earth, in his own heart, there would have been peace with God and good-will towards men.

Was there no apprehension of such an alternative in

the mind of Herod that night? Did it never once occur to him that he was a man, not to say a king; and that he had but to speak the word, and John was free? Was there not a critical instant, when he had almost ventured on such a step,—when the spell was all but broken, and he was on the very point of asserting his liberty of choice?

And is there not always some faint and passing glimpse of a freer and better choice darting across the gloomy helplessness of soul with which you abandon yourself to a supposed necessity of evil? Are you not conscious, that in every step you have been taking there has been a moment when, by one vigorous effort, you might have broken the vile enchantment under which you were spell-bound? Nay, are you not conscious that there has been a moment when you found yourself on the very point of breaking it? At such a moment the truth has flashed upon you, and you have felt that the cords which bound you were become as flaxen threads. The mercy of God in Christ is within your grasp; the Spirit is moving in your soul. One stroke, and you are free; one leap, and you are safe;— free to close with Christ, in spite of all evil surmises and misgivings,—safe in the embrace of Christ, whatever storms may rise and rage around.

You know that there has been such a crisis as this; and the remembrance of it is apt to enhance the bitterness of your despondency. But it need not, and it should not do so. Rather let it open your eyes to the utter worthlessness of such pleas as the adversary may be urging for keeping you insnared in his wiles. Take

courage for one prompt and peremptory exertion, with fear and trembling, of your own power to will and to do, in the humble confidence that God worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. There are really no obstacles in your way, if only your false pride and shame will give place to that fear of God which knows neither fear of man nor favour of man; and if only you will believe assuredly that, with reference to the matter on hand, the practical question to be determined, "now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation."

II. Thus far we have considered Herod's plea as urged rather in weakness than in wilfulness; and this is doubtless the most common case among professing Christians; and it is, practically, the most interesting. But the partition between weakness and wilfulness is very slight and slender; and as "secret faults" rapidly and imperceptibly pass into "presumptuous sins," so what may be at first the honest and really distressing complaint of occasional infirmity, is apt to become, ere long, the contented acquiescence of a confirmed and customary "walking after the course of this world."

The growth of this wilful spirit may be traced, first, in your more deliberate justifying of yourself; and, secondly, in your more daring defiance of God.

The first symptom is the increasing deliberation, and perverse, systematic ingenuity, with which you justify yourself. With increasing ease you evade duty,—with increasing boldness you palliate sin.

Is a call of duty addressed to you,—whether from

without, through the word and providence of God, or from within, through the stings or stirrings of your own conscience? Is the Spirit of the Lord dealing with you on the score of any neglected obligation, whether of piety and prayer, or of liberality and love? Are you urged to give more earnest heed than hitherto to the exercises of private retirement and social worship,—the closet, the study, the prayer-meeting, the Sabbath, and the sanctuary? Are you pressed and straitened in your own mind, as to a more frequent and devout perusal of the word of God, and a more punctual observance of all the hallowed and hereditary order of a Scottish Christian home? Or is it some opportunity of greater usefulness and more active zeal in the Lord's cause that is presented to you? And are you conscious of something very like a call from heaven, to part with more of your substance for heavenly ends, or to give more of your time and thoughts to such works as may awaken joy among the heavenly hosts? And are you hesitating and hanging back? It is not that you either doubt or deny the general reasonableness of what is asked. Gladly would you aim at the very highest standard of Christian perfection,—as some whom you can name may easily do, and as you yourself hope one day to be able to do. At present, however, with every desire on your part to aspire to the most elevated style of Christianity, you do not see how it can be practicable. You are "exceeding sorry;" but your indispensable engagements, and the demands of the society in which you move, form an obstacle, in the meantime, insurmountable.

So far, your reasoning has the aspect of a graceful and sorrowful declinature. But a question or two may be permitted. Do you find, for instance, we may ask, that this process of apologetic pleading is becoming easier to yourself,—that you can satisfy yourself now with reasons such as, at one time, would have availed you little,—that appeals to your conscience, and misgivings in your conscience, are disposed of more promptly than they once were? Or again, we may ask, Are you beginning to calculate more confidently than you could once venture to do, on the acquiescence of others? Formerly, even when your own judgment, as you persuaded yourself, was convinced, and your own conscience was consequently at ease, you had doubts as to your being able to carry other judgments along with you; and you would have shrunk, with a somewhat nervous sensitiveness, from the idea of submitting your case unreservedly to the opinion of your most intimate Christian friend, not to speak of the verdict of the general Christian world. Have you grown bolder now? Above all, we may ask finally, are you secretly conscious that, when your apology is sustained, whether by yourself or by others around you, there is not really, in spite of all your expressions of regret, and all your attempts to be "exceeding sorry," a latent feeling of relief, rather than a sense of disappointment, as if it were not a labour of love which you were reluctantly hindered from undertaking, but a task and irksome drudgery, from which you had contrived to make your escape?

Beware in such circumstances of the hardening of your

hearts through the deceitfulness of sin. If questions like these cause you ever so little to wince and feel sore, it is high time for you to awake out of sleep. It is no longer in mere weakness alone, but partly, at least, in wilfulness also, that you are availing yourselves of the convenient services of a "But yet;" and although you may still, from time to time, experience enough of poignant and sharp remorse to make you "exceeding sorry," it is now fast becoming a settled thing with you, that such sorrow is simply a calamity and vexation, with which you must lay your account, and of which, however troublesome it may be as a drawback on your liberty, it is scarcely reasonable to expect that you should ever be able altogether to get rid.

The same sad course might be traced in the palliation of sin, as well as in the evasion of duty. And here the rapid progress which may be made in the art of self-justification conspicuously appears. For the vague and indefinite character of the line that marks off the forbidden ground, enhances at once the force of temptation and the facility of finding excuses for compliance. There are so many difficult questions that may be raised as to particular instances of worldly conformity, and the considerations for and against them are so complicated, that the path of duty comes to be enveloped in a cloud; and you are at a loss whether to go or to stay, whether to resist or to yield. Thus you venture upon your first liberties with doubtful steps, being really unable to determine what is best. But the misfortune is, that you soon become unwilling too. The sort of haze, which at first

was so distracting and distressing, gradually becomes rather welcome than otherwise. The difficulty which you feel in determining the right course ceases to be so vexatious as once it was, and you are rather inclined to take refuge in it. Naturally, in such a state of mind, you exaggerate the difficulty. In fact, you have no objection to see the whole subject of the Church's separation from the world involved in an inextricable maze of minute sophistry and special pleading. And you glory in the doubtful interpretation and seeming elasticity of gospel principles and gospel precepts—the very feature about them over which you professed, at first, most painfully to lament.

Alas! how soon and how certainly does this mode of thought, in regard to gospel principles and gospel precepts as a whole, lead to a confirmed habit of tampering with these principles and precepts in detail! And then, with what ease do you contrive to give yourself indulgence as you practise the tricks of trade with which your professional calling may be beset, and join in the lighter levities, or in the graver follies, of your rank and station in the world. You may be still sorry, "exceeding sorry;" but it is the sorrow of one bemoaning a fatality, not bewailing a fault. And, accordingly, it scarcely at all disturbs the equanimity of your complacent acquiescence in many things which once might have greatly shocked you, but which now you have learned to view in their right light, as inevitable incidents of your place and standing,—to be regretted, perhaps, but scarcely to be remedied or redressed.

Thus your skill in the art of justifying yourself is rapidly improved by practice; and you may rely on it, that your bold defiance of God will keep pace with it. This is the other mark, or symptom, of weakness passing into wilfulness, to which we referred; and a very few words may suffice to expose its insidious and deadly nature.

It is always a dangerous thing to tempt the Lord; and never is it more so than when you tempt him with a sincere expression of sorrow, and under a plausible plea of necessity. It may be the very turning-point of your spiritual history. It is, indeed, a critical moment when at any time you find yourself beginning to reckon beforehand on the forbearance of God. Deeply, daily, must you be indebted to that forbearance; and the more you know of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of your own heart, and the more you grapple in close conflict with the world, the devil, and the flesh, the more must you feel your ever-increasing debt of obligation. But there is the utmost possible difference between your owning the forbearance of God, as it is with unwearied pity and patience exercised towards you in your actual walk before him, and your anticipating that forbearance, and laying your account with it in the previous planning of your walk. The two states of mind are "wide as the poles asunder." There is a great gulf between them,—though, alas! it is a gulf over which the deceitfulness of sin can but too easily and imperceptibly effect a passage.

And if you once begin to venture on such a liberty with God, where are you to stop? It is in itself essentially the height of presumption thus to treat the High

and Holy One. In fact, it is so daring and profane an instance of impiety, that at first you shrink from explicitly avowing it, even to your own mind. But mark the beginning of evil.

Is there ever a course of conduct to which you reconcile yourself, perhaps with some difficulty, by the reflection, that if it be not altogether right, God, in his long-suffering patience, and in consideration of your difficulty, may pass it by? What is this but the germ of the very spirit that prompts the language of the wicked, "The Lord seeth not, the Lord regardeth not;" "Where is the God of judgment?"—the spirit which the Lord so signally rebukes, "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes"? (Psalms x. xiv. l.)

You may not, indeed, adopt the very words of the ungodly; you may even repudiate the thoughts and imaginations of their hearts. But what is it that your conduct really implies? Let it be ever so trifling and unimportant a step that you are called to take; let it be a step, moreover, about which ever so much may be said in the way of specious advocacy and extenuation; and let it be taken with ever so many compunctious visitings of regret, and under ever so strong a pressure of necessity;—still, is it a step for which, as you take it, you have a shrewd idea that you will have to draw more or less upon the forbearance of God? Then, be sure, there is nothing whatever of a difference in principle between that step, so taken, and the bravado of the

scoffers in the last days—"Where is the promise of his coming?" And further, be sure that, having once passed the line of a holy and scrupulous conscientiousness, there is nothing whatever likely to arrest your progress before you reach the stage of hardened insensibility, when you can sin with a high and careless hand, as if you might brave and defy the Holy One to judge you.

Surely this is a consideration well fitted to warn and alarm. God is not mocked. It is no light matter to trifle with him. His forbearance towards sin is not so cheaply purchased as that you may make a convenience of it at your pleasure; nor does his way of dealing with you, in reconciling you to himself, warrant your presumptuous dealing with him as if he were to accommodate himself to you. The Cross of Christ, the just and necessary price of God's long-suffering patience and your perfect peace, makes all such compromise impossible; and the full and free forgiveness of the glorious gospel cries shame on the very thought of it. It is the sure sign of the bondage of guilty fear, to be ever and anon stealing abroad on some sly errand of doubtful gain or pleasure, in the hope of escaping notice or evading punishment. The liberty of conscious acceptance and acquittal—the love and joy of adoption and conscious sonship—demand a franker and more guileless walk. To give way to circumstances which you think you cannot control, being all the while "exceeding sorry," but yet preparing beforehand the plausible excuses that are to justify your doubtful choice,—is to enter on a course of double dealing with God, such as can scarcely fail to land you, perhaps before

you are well aware of it, in the sin of lying against the Holy Ghost, and turning the grace of God into licentiousness,—the sin, in short, of crucifying the Son of God afresh, and putting him to open shame.

We have thus sought to trace the progress of that helpless frame of mind of which we have an example in the miserable imbecility of Herod. We have followed out to its legitimate issue this poor habit of self-justification, which leads you to shelter yourself, as if you were the passive victim of an irresistible fatalism, under pleas of strong necessity and constraint;—pleas compelling you, as you allege, in a manner, to give in. We close with two brief remarks: How unsatisfying, at the best, are these pleas! And how unsubstantial!

In the first place, Whom do they really satisfy? Not yourself; for you are not happy and at your ease, so long as you have so many scruples about yielding, and so long as in yielding you are so "exceeding sorry." Nor are your tempters satisfied. They hail your concession, no doubt, so far as it goes, and are glad to have you taken in their wiles; but your remaining reluctance is a vexation to them; and they will not rest until you go with them freely and joyfully, instead of being so "exceeding sorry." Far less will your God be satisfied. If your own heart condemn you in urging your excuses, and convict you of secret guile,—God is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things. You are labouring in vain, and spending your strength for nought. Come, try a more excellent way; especially since,—

In the second place, these pleas of necessity that em-

barrass you are as unsubstantial as they are unsatisfying. They have no real force in themselves, nor is there anywhere, in any quarter, any right or power to enforce them. On the contrary, there is One not far off, but "standing at the door and knocking;" and if only you will "open to Him," He will put an end at once to this miserable strife,—He "will come in unto you, and sup with you, and you with Him."

Call John out of his prison; let him be your friend once more. Call on Him of whom John bore witness; or rather hear Him when he calls on you. Jesus will speedily cut the knot of all your worldly entanglements, and take you to be altogether his own;—"ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." There is no halting or hesitating with him; no drawback, no reserve, no "But yet" in the whole history of his dealings with poor sinners among men. No such word is upon his gracious lips; nor is the thing it signifies in his large and loving heart. When was he ever found qualifying, or guarding, or hedging the boundless liberality of his calls and offers in the gospel, by such a poor afterthought and cautious reservation as this "But yet"? "Come unto me!" "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come unto the waters!" "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely!" "Whosoever cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out!" Is there ever any "But yet" appended to any of these gracious invitations? No! you are complete in Christ. Believing, you have all things in Christ, unconditionally, unreservedly, assuredly, and for ever, without "if," or "but," or any such thing. Then

believe, and have done with this "But yet" at once, and once for all. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Receive him as he is freely offered to you in the gospel.

"I do—I try—I would," you answer; "But yet—" What! O sinner, perishing as thou art, wilt thou still harp on this poor evasion! When it is thy Saviour, thy God, who is speaking to thee,—giving thee eternal life,—holding forth to thee, as thine for the taking, all that thou canst need for the forgiveness of all thine iniquities and the healing of all thy diseases,—is it for thee to cavil and question any further; thwarting the full and free grace of his proposal with this subterfuge of thine, this equivocating "But yet"? You would fain believe, and have peace in believing, and be all that Jesus would have you to be; "But yet—" Nay, whatever you are going to add, whether you are about to complain of coldness, or deadness, or unworthiness, or unbelief,—whatever is to follow this "But yet" of yours—stop, pause, be ashamed and confounded. Whatever it may be that you are on the point of pleading, can it be anything else than an insult to your Saviour and an offence to your God, to put in any plea whatever in bar of the mercy and the grace which he so freely gives? Come, rather close with him now, unconditionally, unreservedly. Let "ifs" and "buts" have place no longer in your surrender of yourself to him, as they have no place in his giving of himself for you, or in his giving of himself to you. Then, "with enlargement of heart, you will run in the way of his precepts: you will walk at liberty when you have respect unto all his commandments."

X.

PETER—HIS GENERAL CHARACTER—ITS STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS.

"And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" —MATT. xiv. 28–31.

THE incident here recorded illustrates in a very striking manner the character of the Apostle Peter. His whole conduct, on this occasion, is such as vividly to exhibit the peculiarity of his natural temperament; and the rather, when we trace its remarkable though undesigned agreement with what we read elsewhere concerning him.

The character, indeed, of this holy apostle is not in any part of the sacred writings directly drawn; for the historians of the Bible do not deal in professed delineations of individual character, it being their province to narrate, and not to comment. Hence they never undertake to describe at length what such a man was; they content themselves with telling us simply what he did. And this they do without reserve, and generally without remark,—neither elaborately magnifying what is excellent, nor studiously palliating what is wrong, but permitting facts to speak for themselves, and leaving it to the reader to form his own judgment concerning the

merits or defects of the various actors in the scenes which they honestly set before him.

Now, this artless, unaffected simplicity of narration, well becomes the authority of sacred and inspired evangelists; it contributes much to gain credit to their testimony, while it approves itself to the taste of every competent and intelligent judge of such matters. For what person of good sense and good feeling can refuse to believe authors, every page of whose writings bears the stamp of honesty, and of that courage which is fearless and careless of everything but the truth? And, on the other hand, is it not a source of the most refined satisfaction and delight, a high intellectual entertainment as well as an interesting moral experiment, to exercise our own skill in discerning and discriminating character, —to trace for ourselves its broad outline, its marked and distinctive features, its nicer and more minute and delicate shades of peculiarity; and to observe how, in different histories, and in all varieties of situation, the same individual is, without any appearance of artful contrivance or constraint, represented as uniformly and most harmoniously in keeping, if we may so speak, and in accordance both with nature and with himself?

Thus, to those who delight in inquiries and speculations respecting the individual diversities of mental and moral constitution among men, the character of the Apostle Peter must be an interesting study, as it is found to be undesignedly and incidentally delineated in the histories of the New Testament. There is nowhere in these histories any laboured description of his habits and manners, any

formal enumeration or catalogue of his good and bad qualities respectively, such as other historians are so apt to deal in. But a few striking instances of his conduct set the man before us. On whatever occasions we meet with this apostle, we find him always natural, and always the same; distinguished by individual peculiarities from others, yet throughout, in all particulars, fairly and beautifully consistent with himself. And this perfect yet simple consistency we are irresistibly led to attribute, not to any concerted scheme of fiction, but to the native harmony of truth—the unity and uniformity of a common living original. For we feel convinced, as we read and study it, that such a character, thus artlessly unfolded in such different circumstances and by different authors, must have been taken by each of them apart, directly from the life.

The most prominent and distinguishing peculiarities of the Apostle Peter's natural character seem to have been these two:—a certain hasty and generous impetuosity of temper on the one hand, and a certain occasional imbecility or infirmity of purpose on the other; two qualities of mind which are found not unfrequently combined. Easily and deeply impressed with new feelings, and prompt to decide at first with frank and fearless honesty, but without enough of calm consideration, he was apt to be afterwards daunted or disconcerted by difficulties unforeseen and unprovided for. When any new object of pursuit was presented to his view, or any new scene or topic crossed his imagination, his eager spirit seized immediately

on some one of its grand, or imposing, or affecting features. This single idea roused his enthusiasm, and so occupied, overpowered, and engrossed all his soul, that doubt seemed impertinent and delay intolerable; and he had neither thought nor feeling for anything except that upon which for the time his ambition might be set,—an ambition occasionally perhaps fanciful, yet always amiable, and excellent, and noble. In the ardour and impatience of his confident hope, to resolve was to accomplish. With his eye kindled and his heart burning within him, and both alike intently fixed on some one high and honourable aim, he could not bear to be distracted by the remonstrances of cold and timid caution. He could see nothing formidable in his enemy. He could feel no weakness in himself. But passing over in idea all intervening hazards, confident in the strength of his own determination, he grasped the victory ere yet his armour was put on; and, when he had scarcely even conceived his plan, he seemed to himself to have already attained and secured his end.

Now this honest and dauntless spirit did indeed give boldness, energy, and warm cordiality, to his professions and his resolutions, in every enterprise which he undertook; but then, as it was too hasty for deliberation, and would not suffer him to pause before setting out, that he might look around him or look before him, it exposed him to the risk of being taken at unawares and when off his guard, by dangers, against which a little more of timely foresight might have effectually defended him.

Hence that mixture which we observe in Peter's

character of zeal and weakness,—of zeal in purpose and in promise,—of weakness, sometimes, in performance. He was always sincere and earnest in his intentions, although, being often rash and inconsiderate, he heedlessly presumed upon his own strength, and unwarily exposed himself to trial.

Thus, on all occasions, we find him the first and most forward of our Lord's followers, both to avow his attachment and to put it to the proof.

On his very first introduction, indeed, to the Lord—when his brother Andrew and he, along with several others, were attending on the ministry of the Baptist, and Andrew brought him to Jesus, of whom the Baptist spoke, with the glad announcement, "We have found the Messias,"—Peter was specially noticed in language having reference, as we can scarcely doubt, in part at least, to his personal character, as well as to his destined position in the church: "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone" (John i. 42). And we begin to see something of his peculiar temper, his extreme susceptibility of impression, and his quickness of feeling, in his next interview with the Lord on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, after the miraculous draught of fishes (Luke v. 8, 9). He is far more deeply moved by the miracle than his companions; he is affected with a more vivid sense of the holiness of a present God, and his own guilt in his sight: "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." But soon he is reassured by the gracious promise, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men"—and is ready to forsake all and to follow Jesus.

All throughout his waiting upon the personal ministry of Jesus, we trace the same fervency of spirit.

For instance, when our Lord questioned his disciples as to their opinion of his authority, "Whom say ye that I am?" it was Peter who promptly, in their name, made confession of their faith—"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;" and when their Master, seeing many draw back offended, put it to the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" it was Simon Peter who instantly and eagerly replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (Matt. xvi. 16; John vi. 68).

Again: when Jesus filled the minds of his disciples with grief, by announcing his intention of going up, in the face of all his enemies, to Jerusalem, there to suffer and to die, it was Peter who, on the first impulse of his enthusiastic affection—without thinking what a liberty he was taking, in thus objecting and contradicting instead of humbly acquiescing—presumed to remonstrate, "Be this far from thee, Lord;" which inconsiderate and unwarrantable boldness exposed the ardent apostle to that severe reproof, "Get thee behind me, Satan." It was Peter, moreover, who on the Mount of Transfiguration, when James and John were overpowered by the glory of the scene, was ready to make the eager proposal, "Lord, it is good for us to be here: let us build tabernacles." And it was Peter who, in the garden, stung with a holy rage, drew his sword for his Master's defence, in that hasty act which his Master so solemnly rebuked, "All they that take the sword shall

perish with the sword" (Matt. xvi. 22, 23; xvii. 4; xxvi. 52).

Again: when the Saviour exhibited that memorable example of kindly condescension in washing the feet of his own servants, still it was Peter who ventured to argue with him; first bluntly refusing to receive so humble a service from a Master so divine, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." And then, whenever he hears the significant words, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me," see how, with his wonted warmth and impetuosity, he earnestly exclaims, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head" (John xiii. 6-9).

And once more: when our Lord, having risen, appears on the shore, and makes himself known to his disciples as they are fishing in a boat at a little distance, and when Peter, instead of waiting with his companions, and coming in the boat to land, casts himself in his haste into the sea,—who fails to recognise, in this simple but very characteristic incident, the same ardent and eager temperament which uniformly distinguished the zealous apostle? The whole interview, also, which follows, teems with little traits and incidents, all beautifully illustrating the character of Peter. We see him the very same man in his penitence that he was before in his pride. How glad is he to meet his Master again! How anxious to win his kind eye once more—the eye which, when last he met it, was so full of wounded love! How eager also to testify his returning affection, and how prompt and bold to profess and promise anew, though in humbler

faith and a more chastened spirit, yet with all his wonted warmth, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee!" Nay, even the slight question which he then asked concerning the fate of his brother apostle John, "Lord, and what shall this man do?"—this question, which every reader at once feels that Peter, rather than any other, was likely to put, suits his somewhat forward, yet affectionate turn of mind—just as perfectly as does our Lord's reply, "What is that to thee? follow thou me" (John xxi).

So hearty and affectionate a disposition—altogether disinterested, generous, and honourable—admirably fitted this apostle for the endearments of friendship. And accordingly Peter evidently enjoyed, in a high degree, the private and personal attachment of the Master whom he so warmly loved. Jesus, indeed, seems to have all along taken a lively interest in the discipline and improvement of this apostle's amiable yet imperfect character. Thus, even in the most trying scene of his life, Jesus failed not to remember his erring disciple; at the very time, too, when that disciple had meanly disowned and denied him. "The Lord turned and looked upon Peter;" and by that look—of more than human power and more than human tenderness—melted his heart to penitence: "Peter went out and wept bitterly." At his resurrection, also, in the message which he sent by the women—how kindly and considerately does he make special mention of his fallen follower and friend: "Go, tell the disciples, and Peter!" What a token is this to the mourning apostle, after his grievous sin and his bitter

weeping! And when they meet, still remembering the disciple who had fallen—how graciously does Jesus take an opportunity of accepting his penitence, and sealing and ratifying the penitent's pardon! By the thrice-repeated question, "Lovest thou me?" he invites him to renew his profession of attachment just as often and as devotedly as he had formerly renounced it; while, by the thrice-repeated command, "Feed my lambs," "Feed my sheep," he comforts his wounded spirit by thus most solemnly and emphatically restoring him to the apostolic office which he might be held to have forfeited (Luke xxii. 61; Mark xvi. 7; John xxi. 15-17).

Still, however, the same cordial warmth of temper, which raised him so far above all timid and selfish meanness, and endeared him so much to his beloved Master, occasionally hurried Peter heedlessly into situations of danger, where his courage, surprised and alarmed, was apt to fail. Thus it was in the instance of his lamentable fall, when, but a few hours after his bold and manly declaration, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee," and after he had been ready to shed blood in his Master's cause, he was betrayed by temptation—to which his own rash self-confidence exposed him, and against which he had been expressly warned—into a base and perjured disavowal of the very name he had so sacredly pledged himself to honour (John xiii. 38; xviii. 15-27). And thus it was, also, in the instance of his walking with Jesus on the water (Matt. xiv. 28-31). We see how ready he was at first to expose himself, and how soon and how easily he was terrified in

the moment of danger. While the other apostles were scarcely yet recovered from the consternation into which they were thrown, first by their helpless exposure to the midnight storm, and then by the sudden appearance of Jesus, whom, in their alarm, they mistook for a spirit,—Peter, as usual, distinguished himself by the prompt alacrity of his devotion. No sooner did he recognise his Master, than—forgetting all the fears which he had cherished in that Master's absence, while tossed on the waves of the tempestuous sea—he thought only of his presence now, eagerly and hastily seeking permission on these very waves to meet with him. Yet no sooner did he actually encounter their fury than his high-wrought resolution gave way: "When he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid." Now he might have observed, before he left the ship, that the wind was boisterous. But so much was he struck by the amazing miracle which he beheld, and so exclusively engrossed with the idea of meeting his Master on so new and singular a path, that he took no time to consider or reflect; and therefore he was not proof against the terrors of the storm, which really came upon him suddenly and altogether unexpectedly. How perfectly, how beautifully consistent, is this occurrence with the apostle's general character! How much in harmony with the spirit of his ordinary conduct! How natural in him, the first hasty excitement of his zeal, as well as the subsequent failure of his confidence and courage!

Such seems to have been the original character of the

Apostle Peter,—always impetuous,—sometimes weak. Such he appeared before the memorable day of Pentecost and the descent of the Holy Ghost. After that time, though we must observe a decided and remarkable change in Peter, as in all the apostles,—his enthusiasm being tempered, and his courage sustained, by the calm resolution of a more spiritual faith,—still we may perceive in his conduct abundant traces of his natural, his wonted warmth,—and some little of his wonted weakness too. For the inspiration of the Spirit did not then—any more than his ordinary gracious influences do now—level all the distinctive prominences and peculiarities of natural constitution into one dead, flat, and insipid uniformity. The persons inspired still retained their natural temperament of mind and body. They were changed as to the direction of their powers; but still, in respect of the powers themselves, they were the same as before. So Peter, even after he came under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, showed his former high determination and hearty impetuosity. For do we not still find him foremost among the apostles in their holy work and warfare,—the most ardent, the most forward and earnest, in the labours of his missionary office,—the boldest in facing danger,—the most dauntless in encountering death? The early chapters of the Book of Acts sufficiently attest the prominent part which Peter took in all the proceedings and in all the sufferings of the early Church; and show how heartily he threw his whole soul and spirit into the glorious cause which he was called and commissioned to promote. And as even their inspiration did not render

the apostles perfect or faultless, so after his great spiritual change we may still detect in Peter some remains of his original defect. In one instance at least, as we know from the testimony of his "beloved brother Paul," he betrayed a culpable weakness, when, out of deference to the prejudices of the Jews at Antioch,—whom he desired to conciliate, or feared to offend,—he in some way disguised or dissembled his own views relative to the liberty of the Gentile converts, and their right of exemption from the yoke of Jewish ceremonies; compromising thereby the essential and fundamental doctrine of the gospel—justification by faith alone, without ceremonies or observances of any kind, or any works at all of any law. In that instance Paul tells the Galatians concerning Peter: "I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." It was the very fault which had previously characterized him that in this instance he was to be blamed for,—a want of sufficient firmness and decision in following out his own purposes, and adhering, amid all difficulties and trials from without, to his own higher principle and better judgment (Gal. ii. 11-21).

Such then was Peter—such a man naturally—such a disciple—and, through grace, such an apostle.

Now his character is exhibited for our instruction. From his imperfection we may learn a lesson of humility —from his infirmity a lesson of self-distrust. For if he was misled thoughtlessly and incautiously, through ignorance of his weakness, surely it little becomes us to presume upon our own strength, or to trust in our own

hearts. We are to shun his errors; but then let us not forget his admirable, his noble excellences. His one great fault of rash and inconsiderate self-confidence should teach us prudence; but let us beware of that prudence which is indolence, or reluctance, or selfishness in disguise. We do well, no doubt, to reprove his impetuous and impatient hastiness of temperament. But his affectionate, disinterested, and unreserved attachment to the Saviour—his generous and devoted earnestness in the cause of God and Truth—may reprove and put to shame those doubtful and dilatory scruples, by which we would fain excuse ourselves from the "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope." Truly it well becomes your dull and drowsy formalists in religion, to criticise and coolly to condemn this prince of all the apostles, and to plead to themselves his occasional error in one extreme, as a justification of their continual crime in the other! For surely, after all, there may be as much of weak timidity in a cold heart, as there can be of rashness in a keen temper and an ardent spirit. There are men who are ever ready, with the chilling air of insinuated doubt, to blast and wither the energy of religious hope;—prophets of evil, who would suppress every lofty aspiration of faith, and discourage every wish and every plan of good, by the poor suspicions of their shrewd policy and their worldly wisdom; anticipating always the hazard of failure, just hinting the chances of coming danger and defeat. But let such men know, that if to make rash vows and inconsiderate attempts in a holy cause, is folly,—to make no vows and no attempts at

all, is sin. Let them look—let us all look—to the generosity of Peter's self-denial and self-devotion. And while we resolve more circumspectly and act more deliberately than he sometimes did, let us learn to resolve and to act as nobly for God, and in the strength of God. We may seek to avoid his impetuosity; but let us not forget, that, without something of his enthusiasm, nothing great, nothing good, can ever be achieved. There may be danger when there is zeal without knowledge. Is the danger less when there is no zeal at all?

XI.

PETER—THE TRIAL, INFIRMITY, AND TRIUMPH OF HIS FAITH.

"O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"—MATT. xiv. 28–31.

THE incident recorded in this passage of Scripture not only illustrates generally the character of the Apostle Peter, but affords a particular example of his faith—its power, and its weakness too—such as may be usefully studied. The whole of this midnight scene, indeed, is full of instruction to the believer, especially in seasons of darkness and doubt. The disciples are sent to sea alone; their Master constrains them to get into a ship and go before him to the other side of the lake, while he remains behind, first to dismiss the multitude whom he has miraculously fed in the desert, and then to go up into a mountain apart to pray. At first, in the calm evening and on the smooth waters, fresh as they were from the wondrous feast, the disciples might think little of their temporary separation from their Lord, as they cheerfully launched forth their little bark, in anticipation of a short and easy voyage, and a happy meeting on the other side. Suddenly the sky is overcast, the wind is contrary, and, midway across the sea, the ship is tossed with waves. And where at this critical moment is Jesus? Why is he not with them, to say to the stormy billows—"Peace, be still?" Has he forgotten them? "This is their in-

firmity." Did they not "remember the works of the Lord and his wonders"—not in their case—"of old?" (Ps. lxxvii. 10, 11.) Alas! they feel desolate and forlorn. And, lo! to trouble them still more, here is a vision, an apparition of a shadowy, spectral form, in the dark mist—the spirit of the tempest, as it might seem, mocking their helplessness as he makes them "reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man!" Truly "they are at their wits' end;" when a blessed voice out of the gloom reassures them, and the well-known accents fall upon their ears—"Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid."

What a lesson to a doubting soul! What a rebuke of unbelief! "The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid. Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known" (Ps. lxxvii. 16, 19).

Rushing, with his usual impetuosity, from one extreme to another, Peter not only recovers his self-possession, but rises as by a rebound to the highest pitch of boldness. We may be sure he had been at least as much depressed as his fellow-disciples—as ready to despair of help while Jesus was absent—as apt to mistake his abrupt approach in an unexpected way as if it were a vision of judgment, and not a visit of love. But what a start he makes, on the instant, out of the lowest depth of trouble and terror, to what might seem the very romance of confidence and daring, rather than the chastened and sober reality of humble faith! And that there is something of the spirit of romance here, we are far from denying; nay, it is this very feature in the incident before us that gives it, in our

view, at once its charm and its value;—its charm, as a picture of most attractive interest; and its value, as a lesson of the utmost practical worth. Certainly, the alternations of a mind like Peter's—even when it seems to be capriciously tossed to and fro between what looks too like despair and what savours too much of fool-hardiness—are preferable to the monotony of an ever placid and unbroken calm. The living enthusiasm of faith, with all the irregular fluctuations of its beating pulse and throbbing heart, is better far than the uniformity of a dead sleep, or sloth. It is not always the most unwholesome weather when the glass shows rapid variations between the points of storm and fair; nor is it a bad sign of the glass itself, that its index sometimes makes sudden enough leaps upon the dial-plate, in obedience to these atmospheric changes.

There is life, then, in Peter's faith—life, and not a little health too; otherwise it would have nothing in it either to attract or to edify. But the incident which we are now to consider is both attractive and edifying; affording us an insight into the workings of a lively faith in a lively soul, and bringing out, in the liveliest manner, its genuine sincerity, its imperfection, and its ultimate prevalence and triumph.

That Peter's faith in Jesus was at all events and upon the whole sincere, is manifest from these two circumstances in his behaviour:—that at the first, in dependence upon Jesus, he left the vessel; and, again, when sinking, called upon him for aid. He must have believed that it was no

incorporeal spirit, but his own beloved Master, whom he saw, and whose voice of encouragement he heard; and he must have been thoroughly convinced that he was both able and willing to sustain his footsteps on the treacherous path which he invited him to tread: otherwise his conduct, in attempting to walk on the water, was utter madness; and his cry when sinking, "Lord, save me!" was the mere raving of delirious terror. His faith, then, might be weak, and liable to the interruption of doubt; but still it was genuine and hearty.

And the very words of our Saviour's reproof manifestly imply that it was so: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Peter is not charged with the sin of having no faith at all, though he is reproved for having little faith. Nay, at the very instant of his culpable doubting, his faith was in active exercise; for in faith he had been willing to comply with his Master's call, and in faith he was making his earnest prayer to him for help. He had faith, therefore, and that sincere faith, though he had not much faith, or strong faith. He had such a faith as made him hazard his life on the truth believed, and told him where in danger to seek for safety.

By the example, therefore, of Peter's faith, we are taught that uneasy thoughts and anxious fears, however inconsistent they may be with the abundance and the strength of energetic faith, are not always or necessarily inconsistent with its genuine reality. He who doubts in the time of trial is evidently a man of comparatively little faith, and, as such, may be reproved; for his doubt intimates some remains of unreasonable and unworthy dis-

trust: "Wherefore dost thou doubt?" But still he may be a man of true and sincere faith. Nay, his very doubt and disquietude may arise from an experience which, while it proves the weakness of his faith, must be regarded, at the same time, as proving anything rather than his total want of faith;—as from a deep conviction of his own sinfulness and helplessness, which is rarely found unconnected with some measure of a believing knowledge of Christ, his holiness, his grace, his power; or from a keen sense of those very difficulties and temptations to which the warmth, the zeal, and the devotedness of his believing love to Christ may have mainly contributed to expose him.

Yes, there are difficulties, there are dangers and disasters, in the true believer's course, of which your smooth formalist and mere worldly professor of Christianity can know nothing. There are terrors in sin which the unawakened conscience never feels; trials in a holy walk which the "contented dweller in decencies" never has to face; vicissitudes in the inward conflict with corruption, and the inward fellowship of the soul with its God, of which they who pace the dull routine of outward ordinances, and call such bodily exercise religion, cannot even imagine the possibility. Ah! it is easy for those who have never learned to be tremblingly alive to the realities of God's wrath on the one hand, and his blessed favour on the other; who have never looked hell in the face, and never basked in the sunshine of God's reconciled countenance as a prelude of heaven itself; who have never felt what it is to cast a trembling glance on the Lamb of

God, and lay a trembling hand on the atoning sacrifice,—scarcely venturing, even on the strongest and broadest assurances of the free offer and full welcome of the gospel, to commit their souls to a gracious and waiting Saviour; who have never, in short, encountered the actual work and warfare of a life of unreserved self-dedication to God;—it is easy for them to be placid and unruffled in their temper, and to pass through this world of sin and sorrow with an equanimity that seems entitled to all praise. No wonder that any record of the ups and downs of a spiritual man's experience should seem to them either a mystery or a lie. The doubts, and fears, and groanings, and unspeakable cries and tears of David, in the Psalms,—or of One greater than David,—they set down as mere exaggerations. But if there be any who find in such deep movements of soul only too true a picture of their own state—if there be any who, in trouble of body or anxiety of mind, are apt to be shaken and to be afraid—it is something for them to learn and see, from this instance of Peter, that such doubting, however it may indicate remaining unbelief, is not necessarily of itself a proof, either that they do not believe now, or that they have never believed at all. And if, in the midst of such natural anxieties, and the fears which beset him on every side, the Christian, when sinking under the weight of conscious infirmities, is enabled in his distress to call upon the Lord—"Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord"—then, though his faith may be little, it may be a true faith still; and his earnest ejaculation, "Lord, save me," will be heard and answered as a prayer of faith.

Nay, more; as in the case of Peter, this very proof—this practical and experimental instance of his unbelief—will itself be made the occasion of strengthening and encouraging his faith. The Saviour's hand will be stretched forth to help, and his ready Spirit will descend to comfort, even while his voice of mild expostulation—ever averse to break the bruised reed or to quench the smoking flax—gently reprimands the sin and folly of distrust: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

But let us further observe, that the faith of Peter, though sincere, was yet imperfect; and accordingly, our Lord's question, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" while it implied a gracious acknowledgment of his prayer, even in the instant of his faith beginning to waver, implied also a reproof of that very wavering. And the reproof was just. The question might well be asked of Peter, and of every one of us, when, like him, under the very eye of our Saviour—who, exalted as he is, and gone apart to pray for us, still bends on us a look of sympathy—we are ready to faint in the trials to which he calls us;—the question might well be asked, "Wherefore dost thou doubt?" Wherefore? for surely while He is so near us there is no cause of fear. Such doubt, both in Peter's case and in ours, must be alike unreasonable and sinful.

Let us mark here the progress of Peter's temporary distrust and doubting, that we may see exactly the nature of his sin.

When Peter, then, first recognised his Master's presence, so forward was he to profess his faith, and to put his reso-

lution to the test, even at the hazard of his life,—so great was his anxiety to meet Jesus, and so implicit his confidence, that he was willing to trust himself with him even on the yielding waves. Yet, notwithstanding this almost childish eagerness, he was not so hasty but that he felt the necessity of his Master's sanction being previously given to a proposal which, without such a divine sanction, and the implied promise of divine help, it must have been folly in him, or in any man, to make. Accordingly, he desired to know his Master's will and pleasure in this matter. He did not venture upon a single step without first inquiring what his Master would have him to do. He appealed to his judgment and sought his countenance: "Lord, if it be thou"—as surely, indeed, it is thou—"bid me come unto thee on the water." He would not go unbidden. Impetuous as he was, he would not run into danger without a call,—he waited for his Master's invitation. It may seem to us, indeed, that in courting and seeking that invitation, the apostle was too rash and hasty. And certainly it does appear, that when he confidently challenged so severe a trial of his faith, he was not sufficiently aware of the weakness of that faith;—though, after all, where his Lord was, it was surely good for him to be; and he could scarcely avow too strong an attachment to Jesus, or cherish too impatient a longing to bear him company, through whatever dangers his way might lie.

One thing, however, at least is evident,—when he received the invitation, "Come," Peter unquestionably did right in complying with it. His error afterwards

consisted in this—that he distrusted that divine assistance which had been virtually pledged and secured to him. But, certainly, after the profession which he had made, and the command which he had received, there was no room for reluctance or hesitation. He could not now draw back without a complete renunciation of all his love to the Saviour, and all his hope in his mercy. He made the profession, perhaps, somewhat rashly, when he abruptly proposed to venture on so bold an attempt; yet it was a good profession, a good proposal after all,—it had obtained his Master's approbation. And at all events, when he was taken at his word, and required to prove the sincerity of his profession, by acting according to his own proposal, he had only one course to pursue,—that of instant and unreserved obedience. He did not, therefore, we now see, presumptuously and needlessly encounter this trial of his faith. He did so at his Master's invitation, and by his Master's express authority. And accordingly, we may observe, while Jesus reproved him for his doubting in the time of trial, he did not reprove him for his spontaneous proposal to come unto him, much less for his readiness to obey in faith, and at all personal hazards, the commandment which he had received to come. Thus the sin of Peter, in this instance, must be held to lie, not certainly by any means in the zealous profession which he made of his faith, nor in the prompt alacrity of his faithful obedience, but in the weakness and unsteadfastness of that faith which he professed, and in which he obeyed.

Such precisely was Peter's sin,—such is the sin against

which we have to guard. For we too, from time to time, make precisely such a profession of our faith as Peter did, and express like him our desire of meeting with our Lord and Saviour, even though it should be on the waves of a stormy ocean. When we see,—as it is hoped each one of us not unfrequently in devout musing sees,—when we see him standing not far from our souls, and hear him addressing to us those words of mild encouragement with which he revived the drooping hearts of his faint and disconsolate disciples, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid;"—when thus, in his own appointed means and ordinances, we recognise a present God, especially if it be after a season of midnight gloom and tempest;—in the ardour of our faithful and honest zeal we are constrained to exclaim with Peter, 'Lord, since now I know that it is thou, bid me come unto thee and I will confidently and joyfully come, even walking, if need be, on the dark and deceitful waters of the deep.' It may be that we often make this profession somewhat rashly and inconsiderately, presuming upon our own competency, not knowing sufficiently our weakness, or pausing to think of the temptations which await us. But then we have professed, and surely we do not repent of our profession. From time to time, with peculiarly affecting solemnity, in the holy sacrament of the Supper we profess,—every Sabbath, every day of the week, in our retirement, we profess—this very morning, in our closets,—this Sabbath, in the Lord's house,—this Communion Sabbath, at the Lord's table,—with tears and prayers we have professed our willingness, our anxiety,

to go to Jesus, even though we should have to go through darkness and a stormy sea. We have said that our great delight, our supreme desire, is to be with Jesus, and to enjoy his holy and spiritual fellowship; that, with this view, we are prepared cheerfully to renounce our most favourite sin,—fearlessly to encounter the most formidable enemy of our peace,—resolutely to deny ourselves, and to take up our cross and follow wherever he points the way; that as we advance towards him in our Christian course, no difficulties are to shake our holy resolution, since we are willing even to cut off our right hand, and to pluck out our right eye,—to sacrifice our dearest hopes and wishes,—if they keep us apart from him, or cause us to offend against him. All this we have professed, believing that He who sustained Peter on the water will uphold us also by his mighty power; knowing assuredly that there can be no danger in the sea when our Saviour is with us,—no terror in the boisterous and stormy wind when He, our God, is there.

Doubtless, in all this zeal of profession and determination, there may have been sin, because there may have been self-deception. For in what act, in what promise or purpose of faith, is there not both? In the excitement of an impressive religious ordinance—in the engrossing earnestness of our devotional feelings—we may forget the pain of self-denial, the trials of active duty, and our own insufficiency in the midst of these trials. And so, being imposed upon by the transient warmth of our enthusiasm, we may fancy our faith to be more firm and trustworthy than in the hour of the world's tempta-

tions it may be found to be. But what then? Do we mend the matter by refusing now to fulfil our obligations? Are we prepared to falsify altogether the profession which we have made?—to decline the work which we have undertaken?—to resist the call which we have received?—wilfully to cast aside our Christian name and our Christian hopes; and pledged as we are—sealed and devoted—yet to draw back, to the perdition of our souls?

Rather, if ever the blessed promises of the gospel have been brought home with unwonted power to our hearts; if ever the love of a crucified Redeemer, set vividly before us in the doctrines of his word, or in the symbols of his death, has touched and affected us, and filled us with new and strong emotions of holy zeal; let us act as we have felt,—let us practise as we have resolved,—not resisting the Spirit nor despising the voice of Him who speaketh now to us from heaven as he spoke to his disciples upon earth. When he says, "Come,"—let us be ready to go, though we may be called to pass through deep waters or walk on a troubled sea.

And then, in the trial and weakness of our faith, we shall be encouraged as we remember the prevailing efficacy of the apostle's seasonable prayer. "When he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and began to sink." But still, in his alarm, he knew to whom he should apply for aid. His faith, though failing, did not altogether desert him; his fear, though it shook his confidence, did not hinder his prayer. He cried, saying, "Lord, save

me." And immediately,—for God is not slow to hear the cry of the afflicted, and send help in the time of need,—immediately Jesus lent his ear, and "stretched forth his hand and caught him."

That ear is not now heavy, that it cannot hear. That hand is not now shortened, that it cannot save; it will be extended to us also, when, in sin and in sorrow, trembling and sinking, we call upon Him for aid. And, as in the case of Peter, our very faintness of heart may be turned to account for ministering not only a reproof of our unbelief, but even a new strengthening of our faith. For the Lord can bring good out of evil, and make all things work together for good to them that love him. When "this poor man cried, and the Lord heard him," he received a new encouragement, such as he would never forget, to "trust and not be afraid." In his doubt and despair he made application to One mighty to save, and the application was not made in vain. In prayer, ejaculatory prayer, the mere cry of utter helplessness, he found relief from terror, and help in his utmost need. So will Jesus help his people still; delivering their eyes from tears, their feet from falling, and their souls from death. His ready Spirit will turn their very groanings which cannot be uttered into prayers; and taking of what is Christ's to show to their souls, he will become to them, and in them, a Comforter indeed. And ever after, the recollection of their experience in such a trying hour will be at once for rebuke and for help and consolation;—as if there were ever before them the gracious face of the living and loving Saviour, and ever ringing in their ears

his calm clear voice of mingled reprimand and revival, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

We are apt to complain sometimes of life's weary trials, and of the difficulties and hardships of our Christian calling; but we may bless God for them all, as for our greatest mercies, if by his grace they thus become the means of directing our thoughts and our prayers to him. When danger is absent, we are apt to depart from God, because we forget our dependence, we forget our infirmity, we are confident and strong in the apparent strength and confidence of our faith; and it is only when we feel that faith to be actually giving way,—its strength all gone, and its high confidence turned into doubt and fear,—it is not till then that we are thoroughly convinced of its utter insufficiency, and disposed to trust no longer in our faith itself, but in the Lord our God, who is the object of our faith.

Thus it may frequently happen, that, being conscious of some particular duty hitherto neglected, or of some one sin which very easily besets us, in the depth of our repentance, and the holy ardour of our faith, we resolve now to perform that duty punctually, and resolutely to renounce that sin. Our repentance may be a repentance of godly sorrow, our faith may be for the time sincere. And feeling quite secure in the conscious integrity of our own good purposes, we forget their weakness,—we forget the difficulty of the task which we have imposed upon ourselves,—we forget the temptation which, in a few short hours, will assail us. But that temptation comes too soon, and the difficulty which we had strangely overlooked is felt.

"We see the wind boisterous, and are afraid, and begin to sink." We find ourselves fast yielding to the allurements or the terrors of the world, which we still too fondly love. Betrayed too by the inclinations of our own deceitful hearts, we find ourselves just about to omit the duty again, and once more, only once more, to commit the sin. But we stop short just in time; we betake ourselves to prayer; and a single thought of heaven, perhaps,—a single ejaculation directed thither,—draws down an influence from on high, to strengthen, to quicken, to revive us.

Happy is it for us if we learn from such critical experience the double lesson of watchfulness and prayer. Happy is it for us if, thus convinced of our own helplessness, we neither resolve nor act in our own strength. "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool."

Let us ponder well the lesson of Peter's faith. Let us learn, like Paul, to profit by our very infirmities. That apostle, for our instruction, has thus recorded his experience: "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh"—some sore outward trial or grievous inward temptation—"lest I should be exalted above measure;" and "I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." The answer was,—not the removal of the thorn, nor any promise as to its removal, but the mere general assurance,—"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." "Therefore," adds the holy apostle, "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong;"—weak in the feeling of

my own utter helplessness; strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

"Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah xl. 27-31).

XII.

MARTHA AND MARY.

PART FIRST.—*Their Common Grief.*

"Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."—John xi. 21, 32.

"IT is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning: but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." Such is the voice of wisdom (Eccl. vii. 2–4). If this is true generally as to the effect which should be produced by familiarizing the heart with the devout contemplation of death, and of the grief which death occasions, it must be especially true when we have Jesus as our companion.

It was our Lord's custom, in his visits to Jerusalem at the feasts, to retire in the evening, after the toils and trials of his daily ministry in the temple, to the quiet village of Bethany, and the peaceful abode of Lazarus. There he found the rest and repose which he needed, in the holy endearments of a congenial family circle;—the nearest approach, for him who "had not where to lay his head," to the warm heartiness of home.

That house is now the house of mourning. Let us

visit it in the company of Jesus, and let us observe how he is received there, and how his presence cheers the gloom.

The sisters, Martha and Mary, greet him with the same pathetic salutation, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." And this might seem to indicate an entire similarity in their sorrow. But if we look a little closer, we see a striking difference of demeanour, corresponding to the manifest difference of their characters generally. And this difference is marked in our Lord's different treatment of them. In every view, this record of sisterly affection is an interesting study. We may learn from it, in the first place, How much sameness there is in grief; secondly, How much variety; and, lastly, How much compass there is in the consolation of Christ, as capable of being adapted to all varieties of grief—to grief of every mould and of every mood. We speak chiefly throughout of the grief of true Christians; for we are surely warranted in assuming that, notwithstanding their great contrast in respect of natural temperament, the two sisters were partakers of the same grace.

At present we advert to the similarity of their common sorrow,—the sameness of their grief. For it is remarkable, that two persons so different in their turn of mind, as we shall afterwards see that these sisters were,—so apt to view things in different lights, and to be affected by them with different feelings,—should both utter the very same words on first meeting the Lord Jesus: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." It shows how natural such a reflection is in such a season;

how entirely the heart, when deeply moved, is the same in all; and how much all grief is alike.

The sisters, however otherwise dissimilar, were united in their fond affection for their departed brother, as well as in their grateful reliance on that Divine Friend "who loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." They had sat and watched together beside their brother's bed of sickness. They joined together in "sending unto Jesus, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." In their distress they both thought of the same remedy, and applied to the same Physician. It was a joint petition that they despatched, and they did not doubt that it would prevail. Together they waited anxiously for his coming. They reckoned the very earliest moment when he could arrive; and as they looked on their brother's languid eye, and saw him sinking every hour and wasting away, ah! they thought how soon their benefactor might appear, and all might yet be well. But moments and hours rolled on, and no Saviour came. Wearisome days and nights were appointed to them. Often did they look out and listen; often did they fancy that they heard the expected sound, and the well-known accents of kindness seemed to fall upon their ears; but still he came not. Ah! what were their anxious thoughts, their earnest communings, their fond prayers, that life might be prolonged at least for a little longer, to give one other chance, one other opportunity, for the interposition of Him who was mighty to save even from the gates of death; and how were their own hearts sickened, as they whispered to the sick man a faint hope, to which they

could scarcely themselves any longer cling! Still the time rolls slowly on. The last ray of expectation is extinguished; the dreaded hour is come; it is over; their brother has fallen asleep,—Lazarus is dead.

And now four days are past and gone since he has been laid in the silent tomb. The first violence of grief is giving place to the more calm, but far more bitter pain of a desolate and dreary sadness,—the prolonged sense of bereavement which recollection brings along with it, and which everything around serves to aggravate and imbitter. The house of mourning, after the usual temporary excitement, is still. It is the melancholy stillness of the calm, darkly brooding over the wrecks of the recent storm. And amid the real kindness of sympathizing friends, and the formal attentions of officious strangers, the sisters, as each familiar object recalls the past, are soothing, or suppressing, as best they may, those bitter feelings which their own hearts alone can know,—when suddenly they are told that Jesus is at hand!

He is come at last, but he is come too late. His having come at all, however, is a comfort. He is welcome as their own and their brother's friend; he is welcome as their Lord. They never doubt his friendship; they do not question his willingness, or his power, to do them good. But still, as they meet him, they cannot but look back on the few days that are gone; and as all their anxieties and alarms, their longing hopes and cruel disappointments, rush again upon their minds, they are constrained to give utterance to the crowded emo-

tions of their hearts in the irrepressible exclamation of regret,—"Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

It is the voice of nature that speaks in these words, —the voice of our common nature mingling its vain reflections with the resignation of sincere and simple faith.

There is here, first, the feeling that the event might have been otherwise: "If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." 'We know not what has detained thee. Some call of duty may have prevented thee from coming; or perhaps our message did not reach thee in time; or it may have been some merely casual circumstance that hindered thee. If this sickness had happened but a little sooner, when thou wast in Jerusalem at the feast; or if we had taken alarm early enough, so as to send for thee before our brother was so ill; or if our messenger had been more expeditious, and had used more despatch; or if we had but been able to lengthen out, by our care, our brother's sickness for a single week;—had we not been so unfortunate in the occurrence of this evil just when it did occur; or had we, when it occurred, used more diligence, and taken better precautions;—then thou mightest have been here, and "if thou hadst been here, our brother had not died."'

Is it not thus that the heart speaks under every trying dispensation? Is it not thus that an excited imagination whispers to the forlorn soul? Who has ever

met with any affliction—who has ever lost any beloved brother or dear friend—without cherishing some such reflection as this? 'If such or such a measure had been adopted; if such or such an accident had not happened; if it had not been for this unaccountable oversight, or that unforeseen and unavoidable mischance; so grievous a calamity would not have befallen me,—my brother would not have died.'

Alas! alas! the reflection, however natural, is only a sinful and sad delusion,—proceeding upon a very limited view of the power and the providence of God our Saviour. How did these sisters know that, if Jesus had been there, their brother would not have died? How could they tell whether he might not have ends to serve, which would have required that, even though he had been there, he must have permitted their brother to die? And were they not aware that, though he was not there, yet, if he had so chosen and so ordered it, their brother would not have died? Had they not heard of his being able, at the distance of many a long mile, to effect an immediate and complete cure of the most deadly disease? Did they not believe that he had but to speak, and it would be done; he had but to say the word, and, however far off he was, his friend and their brother would be healed? Ah! they had forgotten who it was to whom they made this most touching and pathetic appeal;—that he was one who, though not actually present, could have restored their brother if it had been consistent with his wise and holy will; and that he was also one who, even if he had been present,

might have seen fit, for the best reasons, to suffer their brother to die.

And are not these the very truths concerning the Lord Jesus Christ which you in your distress are tempted to forget, when you dwell so much on secondary circumstances and causes, instead of at once and immediately recognising his will as supreme? You are overtaken by misfortune; you are overwhelmed in the depths of sorrow. You ascribe your suffering to what seems to be its direct occasion;—whether it be your own neglect of some precaution which you might have taken, had you thought of it in time; or the fault of others, with whose skill or diligence your dearest hopes were inseparably connected; or something perhaps, in the course of events, over which neither you nor they could have any control. You fix upon the very date, the very scene, when and where your brother's doom seems to have been sealed. And this is your train of thought: 'If we had but suspected what was about to be the issue, or if the help which we now see would have been available had then been within our reach; if we had been warned in time, or had taken the warning, or had been able to employ the right means of escape; we might not now have been left disconsolate; our beloved one might still have been spared to cheer us with his smiles, and share with us all our cares,—our brother might not have died.'

So you are apt to think and feel. But however natural the reflection, is it not in reality the very folly of unbelief,—the dream of a soul forgetting that the Lord reigneth? What! is it come to this, that you conceive

of Him as limited by events which he himself ordains,—as the slave of his own laws? You think that if a certain obstacle had not come in to prevent relief, the calamity which you bewail might not have happened. But, notwithstanding that obstacle, might he not, if he had seen fit, have found means to avert the calamity? And are you sure that, even if the obstacle had been removed, he might not have seen fit still to let the calamity come? "If thou hadst been here," say the mourning sisters, "our brother had not died." 'Nay,' he might have answered, 'I could have been here if it had seemed good to me; and, though I was not here, I might have kept your brother alive; and, though I had been here, I might, in very love to him and to you, have allowed your brother to die.'

Look, ye afflicted ones, beyond second causes, to Him who is the first cause of all things! Believe and be sure that the circumstances which you regret as the occasion of your misfortune, are but the appointed means of bringing about what he determines. If evil comes upon you, if your brother dies, it is not because this or that accident prevented relief; it is not because your Lord and Saviour was not with you in sufficient time—but because it was his will. Be still, and know that he is God!

But further, secondly, there may be in this address of the sisters somewhat of the feeling, that the event not only might, but should have been otherwise. There is at least an intimation of their having expected that the

event would have been otherwise: "If thou hadst been here, our brother had not died."

'And why wert thou not here? We sent to thee,—we sent a special message,—a special prayer,—and surely thou mightest have been persuaded to come. Ah! why didst thou linger for two whole days after tidings of our threatened loss reached thee? Why didst thou not make haste to help us? We could not believe that thou wouldest have treated us thus. Thou wast not unmindful of us before. Thou didst regard us as thy friends. Thou didst bless our house with thy presence; making it thy resting-place, thy home. Thou didst choose us before thine own kinsmen. Thou didst select our brother as the object of thine especial affection. And we thought it would have been enough to touch thy heart simply to send to thee, saying, "He whom thou lovest is sick." We thought thou hadst but to hear of his illness to hasten at once to his relief. True, we had no right to dictate to thee, and now we have no right to complain. But we cannot help feeling that "if thou hadst been here our brother had not died;" and that surely thou mightest have been here. It was not so very great a favour that was asked of thee; and was he not worthy for whom thou shouldest do this? He loved thee,—he trusted in thee; and thou mightest have come, if not to preserve his life, at least to soothe and satisfy his dying hours. He looked for thee, and thou didst not appear. To the very last he waited for thee, and thou didst hide thyself. He missed thee, and he was not comforted.'

Such are the instinctive complaints of nature in a

season of sore trial, of bitter bereavement. Thus the wounded soul rises against the stroke that pierces it, and turns round upon the hand that smites it. It is very hard for flesh and blood to believe, in regard to any crushing load of woe, that it is God who directly and immediately ordains it. It is far harder to believe, that in ordaining it he does not do wrong. Simply to be still, and know that he is God, is no easy exercise of resignation. To be sure that what he does is right, that all he does is done well, is even more difficult still.

You fancy that, if He had really been here, it would have happened otherwise,—your brother would not have died. And you feel as if you had had some right to expect that he should have been here,—that it should have happened otherwise,—that your brother should not have died. And you can give, perhaps, many reasons. You can point out many ends which might have been served had your brother been spared,—how faithful and successful he might have been,—how noble a course he might have run. He was just prepared for entering into active life; he was just newly fitted for the service of God in the world; and it does seem strange and unaccountable, that at the very time when his life seemed to have become most valuable, when his character was ripened for increased usefulness, and when the mere word of the great Physician would have brought him back from the gates of death, he should yet have been suffered to die.

Ah! but remember that in all this the Lord may have many purposes in view with which you may be unac-

quainted, which indeed you could not as yet comprehend. Only wait patiently for a little, and you will see that "this sickness is not" really "unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby" (ver. 4). 'Would that thou hadst been here! —thou surely mightest have been here!' is the natural language of the mourner to his Lord. Nay, says the Lord himself to his own disciples, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe" (ver. 15). A hard saying this,—who can always hear it? But consider who it is that speaks. It is your friend, your Saviour. He might have been here, and might have taken care that your brother should not die. And may you not be sure that, if it had been for his glory, and for your good, he would have been here, and would have taken care that your brother should not die? He might have ordered this matter otherwise, you say; and you almost think that he ought to have ordered it otherwise. But may you not believe that, had it been right and good, he would have done so; and that, if he has not, it must be for the best of reasons? What these may be you cannot tell. He may have need of your brother's services elsewhere. He may intend to make his death the occasion of showing forth his glory, and blessing your soul. Only be patient, and hope unto the end. What he doeth you may not know now, but you shall know hereafter. Meantime, as you are tempted to fancy that he might have interfered—nay, that he should have interfered—to prevent the calamity under which you suffer, may not that very feeling, on second thoughts,

suggest the conviction, that if he has not so interfered, it must be because he intends to make to you some gracious discovery of himself, and to confer upon you some special benefit? Be not hasty, then, to judge, but rest in the assurance that all things shall work together for good to them that love God. And though he may seem to stand aloof when you would most desire, and when you most need, his interposition, yet when he does come, be sure that you receive him gladly—as did the sorrowing sisters.

For, lastly, there is apparent in the address of the sisters a sincere, though melancholy, satisfaction in meeting with Jesus when he comes. He has not come so soon as they expected; he has not come at the very time, in the very way, for the very purpose, that they could have wished: still, when he does come, at whatsoever time, and for whatsoever purpose, he is welcome. He is come too late to do them that particular favour which they solicited: still he is come for good, and gratefully do they receive him. True, they say, as if almost in complaint, 'Lord, if thou hadst been here sooner, our brother had not died. But thou art here now; and it is enough. Our brother, indeed, is dead,—and, if it had been possible, we would have had it otherwise. We expected that thou wouldest have come; we wondered that thou didst not come;—for a time, perhaps, we entertained some doubtful and hard thoughts of thee, as if surely thou mightest have come. But now that thou hast come, we are satisfied. We are sure that had it been possible,

consistently with the high ends of thy ministry, and consistently with our own real interest, thou wouldest have been here. We see that thou lovest and carest for us; and though thou didst not at once grant our request precisely as we desired, yet not the less on that account do we take thy visit kindly. Thou art still our best friend, our gracious Lord. "We know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." At thy feet we will still lie down. That thou hast come at all, at our solicitation, is great condescension; that thou hast come in such an hour of trouble, is a peculiarly seasonable act of friendship.'

Happy will it be for you who mourn, if in like circumstances you are enabled to feel as these sisters felt, and to meet your Saviour's gracious advances as they did. In the hour of blighted prospects and disappointed hopes, when the evil which you deprecated has befallen you, you may think that consolation comes too late. Like Rachel, you may weep, and refuse to be comforted; like Jonah, when your gourd withers, you may almost be tempted to say that you do well to be angry. You may turn away when your Saviour draws near; you may sit disconsolate when he calls. 'If he had come for the purpose of averting the calamity,—if he had been here sooner, and had interposed his power to help,—it had been well, for then my brother had not died. But the calamity has overtaken me,—my brother is dead; and what avails it that He is here now?'

Beware of all such impatience, such natural irritability of grief. Reject not the Saviour's visit of sympathy

now, because he did not come to you exactly as you in your ignorance would have had him to come, and did not do for you exactly what you would have had him to do. It is enough that he is with you now, to speak comfortably to you, to bind up your broken heart, to fill the aching void in your affections, and be to you instead of all that you have lost. True, if he had been here before, your brother might not have died, and your brother, alas! is dead. But he is here now,—he who is better than a thousand brothers,—he who hath the words of eternal life,—he who can speak a word in season to the weary soul, and who, when flesh and heart faint, will be the strength of your heart and your portion for ever.

Such might be the feelings common to the two sisters, —such are the feelings of nature mingled with grace common to all sanctified grief,—as indicated in the affecting address, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

XIII.

MARTHA AND MARY.

PART SECOND.—*Their different kinds of Grief, and the Lord's different ways of dealing with them.*

"Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house. Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. . . . . Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."—JOHN xi. 20, 21, 32.

THE simple and pathetic exclamation that bursts from the lips of the two bereaved sisters, as they separately meet with Jesus, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," cannot but find an echo in every breast that has ever mourned over a loss like theirs. The feeling which it expresses is so natural, that we may almost call it the very instinct of grief to reflect on what has happened, with a vague idea of its having been possible somehow to avert it. Nor is the expression of the feeling always sinful, if it be to God himself that we express it. He would have us, indeed, to open our minds and hearts, without reserve, to him; for it is better that our complaint should be poured into his ear, than that it should be pent up in our own bosoms; and the relief which the utterance of it affords may lead to calmer and holier thoughts. Thus, in the present instance, the mourners, amid their very upbraiding of Jesus, as some might count it, were warm and cordial in the welcome

which they gave him. They spoke the language common to all deep and recent grief when they bewailed the untoward accident but for which, as they imagined, the event might have been ordered otherwise. But at the same time they gave evidence of their being under the influence of genuine faith in Jesus, and tender love to him, when they hailed his visit so affectionately as they did, and accepted with meek resignation his seasonable fellowship and sympathy.

Thus far we trace in their conduct the working of a common grief.

But the sisters differed in their sorrow, as they did generally in the leading features of their characters, and their manner of thinking and acting in the ordinary affairs of life. They were persons of very different tempers and dispositions; and this difference is uniformly and strikingly brought out in their treatment of the Lord Jesus. Both looked up to him with reverence; both regarded him with full confidence and tender affection; and both were equally earnest and eager in testifying their esteem and love: but each in doing so followed the bent of her own peculiar turn of mind.

Martha was distinguished by a busy, if not bustling activity in the despatch of affairs. She seems to have possessed great quickness, alertness, and energy, together with a certain practical ability and good sense, qualifying her both for taking a lead herself and for giving an impulse to others. She was on this account well fitted for going through with any work to be done, and she was always awake to the common calls and the common

cares of the ordinary domestic routine of life. Mary, again, was evidently characterized by more depth of thought, more devotedness and sensibility of feeling. She was more easily engrossed in any affecting scene, or any spiritual subject; more alive at any time to one single profound impression, and apt to be abstracted from other concerns.

Hence, as we find it stated on a former occasion when our Lord was received in their house, while "Mary sat at his feet and heard his word," "Martha was cumbered with much serving." She was assiduous, and even officious, in her hospitable anxiety to provide for the accommodation of her guest; and if Jesus had come "to be ministered unto," he would have been best pleased with Martha's attention to all his wants. But as he came, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister," he found greater delight in her sister Mary, who, with the meekness of a disciple, and the earnestness of a spiritually awakened soul, listened to the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. Accordingly, when "Martha said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me," —"Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke x. 40-42). Thus the sisters showed their respective characters as they waited upon the Divine Visitor whom it was their privilege to entertain in their house as a highly honoured guest and a much valued friend.

And as their ways of testifying regard to the Lord Jesus in prosperity differed, so also did their respective modes of demeanour towards him in adversity.

Martha was evidently the first to receive information of his approach (John xi. 20), either because to her, as the mistress of the house, the message was brought, or because, going about the house in her usual manner, she was in the way of hearing intelligence. She went out in haste, impatient to meet the Lord, and to render to him the offices of courtesy and respect. She is ready to be up and doing; she can turn at once from the conversation in which her friends from Jerusalem have been seeking to interest her, and disengage her mind for active exertion. Mary, again, is more absorbed in her grief; her sorrow is of a deeper and more desponding character; for while "Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him, Mary sat still in the house" (ver. 20). This more absorbing intensity of Mary's grief, "the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforted her," seem to have remarked, when they said of her, as they saw her at last rise hastily and go out, "She goeth unto the grave to weep there" (ver. 31). They had not said this of Martha when she went forth. She might be bent on other errands. Mary could go—only to weep. And at first her feelings so overpower her as to prevent her from going at all. The sudden arrival of her brother's friend is a shock too great for her; it tears the wound open afresh, and recalls bitter thoughts. She is plunged by the tidings into a fresh burst of sorrow, and can only "sit still in the house."

Thus, in different circumstances, the same natural temper may be either an advantage or a snare. Martha was never so much occupied in the emotion of one scene or subject as not to be on the alert and ready for the call to another. This was a disadvantage to her, when she was so hurried that she could not withdraw herself from household cares to wait upon the word of life. It is an advantage to her now, that she can, with comparative ease, shake off her depression, and hasten of her own accord to meet her Lord. The same profound feeling, again, which made Mary the more attentive listener before, makes her the more helpless sufferer now; and disposes her almost to nurse her grief, until Jesus, her best comforter, sends specially and emphatically to rouse her. Nor is it an insignificant circumstance, that it is the ever-active Martha who carries to her more downcast sister the awakening message;—so ought sisters in Christ to minister to one another, and so may the very difference of their characters make them mutually the more helpful to one another: "She went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee" (ver. 28).

When the two sisters meet Jesus, the difference between them is equally characteristic.

Martha's grief is not so overwhelming as to prevent her utterance. She is calm, and cool, and collected enough to enter into argument. She can give expression to her convictions and her hopes. She can tell that her faith is not shaken even by so severe a disappointment. Having hinted what might seem to imply a doubt,—

"Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (ver. 21),—she is in haste to explain her meaning, and to give assurance of her undiminished confidence: "But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee" (ver. 22). And then, as the conversation goes on, she is sufficiently self-possessed to listen to a short argument on the resurrection, and to reason with the Lord upon the subject. She invites and welcomes religious discourse, and makes a formal declaration of her faith in Jesus as the author of eternal life: "Yea, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (ver. 23-27).

Not so her sister Mary. She indeed, when at last she is emboldened by her Master's kind message, goes forth to meet him; and her reverence, her devotion, her faith, are not less than those of Martha. But her heart is too full for many words. Her emotions, when she sees the Lord, she cannot utter; the passion of her soul she cannot command,—she can but cast herself down, weeping, before him, and cry, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." She adds not a word more,—she lies prostrate and silent at his feet (ver. 32).

Shall we notice one other distinctive mark of character, exquisitely delicate and true to nature? Jesus, having asked where Lazarus had been laid, is conducted to the tomb, which was "a cave, with a stone upon it." He gives orders to take away the stone: "Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days" (ver. 39). It is not Mary to whom it occurs to offer

this objection; she is silent still, in the unutterable agony of her grief, and the deep reverence of her soul before the Lord. But Martha's wonted officiousness makes her forward, when it might have been more becoming to be "dumb," and to "stand in awe." And the answer of Jesus might well be felt by her partly as a mild reproof: "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" (ver. 40.)

Such are the different aspects which sorrow wears in minds of different stamps, and of different degrees of strength and of sensibility. But if it be the sorrow of a godly heart, it finds in Jesus one who can with the most perfect tenderness and truth adapt his sympathy and consolation to its peculiar character, whatever that may be. It is very instructive accordingly, in this view, to observe the Lord's demeanour towards the two sisters, in his first meeting with them on this occasion, and to see how it was exactly suited to their respective tempers, and their different kinds of grief.

Martha's distress was of such a nature that it admitted of discussion and discourse. She was disposed to converse, and to find relief in conversation. Jesus accordingly adapted his treatment to her case. He spoke to her, and led her to speak to him. He talked with her on the subject most interesting and most seasonable—on the resurrection of the body and the life of the soul. Martha had declared her unshaken trust in him as still having power to obtain from God all that he might ask (ver. 22). And a wild idea, perhaps, crossed her mind, that it might

not even yet be too late—that the evil might, even now, be repaired. If so, it was but the fancy of a moment—the dreamy notion that sometimes haunts the desolate breast, when it strives in vain to realize the loss which it has sustained. A single sad thought brings the recollection, to which, as we have seen, in her characteristic spirit of attention to such details, she afterwards adverts, that her brother has been now four days in the tomb, and corruption must be doing its horrid work upon his body. When, therefore, she hears her Lord's promise, "Thy brother shall rise again," she applies it to his share in the general resurrection: "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (ver. 23, 24). Jesus is anxious to explain himself more fully. He speaks not of a resurrection merely, but of a resurrection in Himself;—not of life only, but of life in Himself: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (ver. 25, 26).

For in fact this is the only true comfort in reference to the future state. He is the only true comforter who can speak, not merely of the immortality of the soul, and of the resurrection of the body, but of Himself as the life of the immortal soul and the quickener of the risen body,—the first-begotten from the dead—the first-fruits of them that sleep. 'Ah, what consolation is it that thy brother lives and shall rise again,—that he lives now in the spirit, and that he shall rise again in the body? The consolation which I give is more effectual and complete

by far. He lives in ME. He shall rise with ME. And what is the life which I continue, even after death, to sustain? It is the very life which I impart now,—life before God,—life in God,—the life of a soul pardoned, justified, reconciled to God, renewed after the image of God, sanctified and made meet for the fellowship of God for ever. And what is the resurrection which I give? Is it not a resurrection to glory—when these vile bodies shall be changed and fashioned like unto my glorious body? It is my own life that I impart to the believer now, and continue to him without interruption beyond the grave: it is of my own resurrection that I am to make him a partaker when I come again.'

These, or such as these, are the only words which, spoken by one who has authority, can shed light on the dark tomb of a lost and buried brother,—or on the darker sorrow of a surviving sister's heart. So the apostle felt when he said, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (1 Thess. iv. 13, 14).

And what though Martha may not as yet understand fully all that is involved in the assurance, "I am the resurrection, and the life?"—she is relieved by having laid on her Divine Friend the burden of her soul, and imparted her sorrows and her hopes to one who can so graciously commune with her concerning the glorious end and issue of them all. It is therefore with somewhat of

a lightened heart that she declares her entire acquiescence in his power, and her perfect trust in his goodness—adopting the usual form of confession by which the disciples were wont to own their Master as the Messiah, "the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (John xi. 27).

When Mary, on the other hand, draws near in the anguish of silent woe, Jesus is differently affected, and his sympathy is shown in a different way. He is much more profoundly moved. He does not reply to her in words, for her own words were few. Sorrow has choked her utterance, and overmastered her soul. But the sight of one so dear to him, lying in such helpless anguish at his feet, is an appeal to him far stronger than any supplication. And his own responsive sigh is an answer more comforting than any promise. "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her," for it was a melting scene, "he groaned in spirit, and was troubled." And when he had asked of the bystanders, "Where have ye laid him?" and received the reply, "Come and see,"—like Joseph, he could not refrain himself—"Jesus wept" (ver. 33-35).

O most blessed mourner, with whose tears thy Saviour mingles his own! O sympathy most unparalleled! To each of the two stricken and afflicted ones the Lord addressed the very consolation that was most congenial. To Martha he gave exceeding great and precious assurances, in words such as never man spake. To Mary he communicated the groanings of his spirit, in language more expressive to the heart than any spoken words

could be. With Martha, Jesus discoursed and reasoned. With Mary, "Jesus wept."

What a friend is this! what a brother! yea, and far more than a brother! And how confidently may you come to him, ye Christian mourners, in every season of trial! For surely he will give you the very cordial, the very refreshment, of which you stand in need. He is a patient hearer if you have anything to say to him; and he will speak to you as you are able to bear it. Your complaints, your regrets, your expostulations, your very remonstrances and upbraidings, may all be expressed to him. He will pity—He will comfort. His Holy Spirit will bring to your remembrance what Christ has said suitable to your case. He will recall to you the Saviour's gracious words of eternal life, and suggest to you considerations fitted to dissipate your gloom, and put a new song in your mouth. And even if you cannot collect your thoughts, and order your words aright,—if you are "dumb with silence when your sorrow is stirred," and as "you muse your heart is hot within you,—oh remember, that with these very "groanings which cannot be uttered the Spirit maketh intercession for you!" And they are not hid from Him who, when he saw Mary weeping, groaned, and was troubled, and wept. There is indeed enough of all varied consolation in that blessed book, which all throughout testifies of Jesus! For the sorrow that seeks vent in words, and desires also to be soothed by words,—there is the Saviour's open ear—there are the Saviour's lips into which grace was poured. For the grief that is dumb and silent,—there are the Saviour's tears.

We have endeavoured to trace the lineaments of two very different characters. We have seen how they appeared in the ordinary scenes of life, and how they manifested themselves in the chamber of sickness—in the house of mourning. On their comparative excellences and defects respectively we pronounce no judgment, further than what may be gathered incidentally from the narrative as the judgment of the Lord himself. But we may be allowed to say, in conclusion, of Mary's fervency of spirit as compared with Martha's diligence in business —This ye ought to cherish, but not to leave the other undone. There is a tendency to regard religion as consisting chiefly in services rendered to the Lord Jesus, and attention and observance paid to him,—in ministering busily, if not to his person, yet to his cause and the affairs of his kingdom. And there is a danger, in days especially when much is to be done, of substituting a certain bustling activity, and liberality, and zeal in the work of the Lord, for deep and devoted piety in waiting upon his word. Never forget, then, that Mary chose the better part. What Jesus chiefly desires is to see you rather sitting at his feet, than cumbered about much serving,—rather that you should ask and receive much grace from him, than that you should make a merit of rendering much service to him. But beware of supposing that there is any inconsistency or incompatibility between these two habits of mind. The tempers of the two sisters may be united and blended. Be it your study and prayer that they may be so in you. Be as fervent in spirit as Mary was,—as diligent in business as Martha

was. Choose the privilege of waiting upon the word of the Lord,—yet, neglect not the work of the Lord. Seize every opportunity, answer every call, of usefulness,—while, at the same time, you cultivate the holy taste for meditative retirement, divine fellowship, and heavenly rest;—even as He did who "went about doing good," and of whom also it is written, that he "spent the whole night in prayer to God." Then may you entertain the confident hope, that in seasons of affliction yours will be the blessedness of uniting both the portions of consolation which the sisters separately received. Jesus will speak to you as he did to Martha,—Jesus will weep with you as he did with Mary.

XIV.

THE FRIENDSHIP OF PETER AND JOHN.

Part First.

"A Friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.—A man that hath" (or would have) "friends must show himself friendly; and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.—Faithful are the wounds of a friend.—Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart; so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.—Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (Prov. xvii. 17; xviii. 24; xxvii. 6, 9, 17).

Such are the maxims of inspired wisdom concerning friendship; and they must surely impress us with the conviction of its being, if not a necessary duty, at least a privilege, whose value can scarcely be over-estimated. The conditions, also, of a pleasant and profitable friendship, are pointedly indicated in these proverbs. To love at all times, and especially in adversity; to give open manifestations of a friendly spirit, and abound in all friendly offices; to stick close—even closer than a brother; to be faithful in inflicting necessary wounds; to refresh with hearty counsel as with the fragrance of a grateful perfume; and to stimulate and sharpen the whole inner man by the collision of mind with mind and heart with

heart, as the eye is kindled into brightness by the quick sympathy of a congenial glance;—such, according to the inspired standard, are the qualities of a genuine friend. Love, constant, active, and close; honest in reproof, kind and cordial in advice, keen and spirit-stirring in converse;—such is the essence of scriptural friendship. For an example of it, we have Jonathan's love to David, "wonderful, and passing the love of women." And a greater than David—David's Son and Lord—"loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus;" and, as has been well observed, from among the twelve whom he ordained to be apostles, chose out one,—"the disciple whom Jesus loved."*

That disciple was surely formed for the cultivation of friendship,—for loving and being loved. His writings breathe throughout a spirit prone to friendship; and, if

* It may not be out of place to quote in full the passage in Boswell's "Life of Johnson" here referred to. It is a conversation with a Quaker lady, about Soame Jenyns' book on the Internal Evidence of Christianity: "BOSWELL: '*You* should like his book, Mrs. Knowles, as it maintains, as you *Friends* do, that courage is not a Christian virtue.' MRS. KNOWLES: 'Yes, indeed, I like him there; but I cannot agree with him that friendship is not a Christian virtue.' JOHNSON: 'Why, madam, strictly speaking, he is right. All friendship is preferring the interest of a friend to the neglect, or perhaps against the interest, of others; so that an old Greek said, "He that has *friends* has no *friend*." Now Christianity recommends universal benevolence,—to consider all men as our brethren; which is contrary to the virtue of friendship, as described by the ancient philosophers. Surely, madam, your sect must approve of this; for you call all men *friends*.' MRS. KNOWLES: 'We are commanded to do good to all men, "but especially to them who are of the household of faith."' JOHNSON: 'Well, madam, the household of faith is wide enough.' MRS. KNOWLES: 'But, doctor, our Saviour had twelve apostles, yet there was *one* whom he *loved*. John was called "The disciple whom Jesus loved."' JOHNSON (with eyes sparkling benignantly): 'Very well indeed, madam. You have said very well.' BOSWELL: 'A fine application. Pray, sir, had you ever thought of it?' JOHNSON: 'I had not, sir.'"—Vol. iv. pp. 147, 148.

we may believe the traditions of history, he was wont to have upon his lips, in his extreme old age, the one precept,—"Little children, love one another." The relation between him and his Divine Master is full of an interest almost too sacred to be rudely handled. But we seem to have a reflection of that relation in his intimacy with his brother apostle, Peter. The indications of that intimacy, slight and incidental as they appear to be, suggest a study full of profit. The two disciples were men of very different temperaments; and their ages, also, differed much. Peter was probably a man comparatively advanced in life when our Lord's ministry began; while John did not reach the limits of the human term of existence here until nearly half a century had rolled on after that ministry was closed. But they were "a pair of friends, though" one "was young," and the other might be, if not actually "seventy-three," yet verging on the borders of his seventh decade.* And the circumstances which originated and matured their friendship may be traced, without much difficulty or doubt, in the evangelical histories.

We shall notice, at present, the successive stages which, as we think, may be observed in the rise and progress of this Christian and apostolic friendship; reserving for separate illustration those more affecting instances of it that occurred towards the close of the Lord's ministry on earth.

The earliest hint of any connection between Peter and

* "A pair of friends, though I was young,
And Matthew seventy-three."—WORDSWORTH.

John, is to be found on the occasion of their first introduction to Jesus.

The two apostles are brought before us together, as fellow-disciples of the Baptist, on the day when he personally and publicly identified Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, the Saviour, whom he had been previously announcing as about to come: "Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!" (John i. 35, 36.) Of the two disciples here referred to as in attendance on the Baptist, one was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother (ver. 40); the other was the Evangelist and Apostle John himself. Such, at least, is a very general impression among interpreters, who gather from John's ordinary manner of writing in his Gospel—in which, whenever he points to himself, he is careful to write without intruding his own name—that it was he who was Andrew's companion on this occasion. Andrew's first impulse is to find his own brother Simon, and announce to him with eager joy the discovery they have made: "We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ" (ver. 41).

And here it would almost seem that we might detect the old man's complacency—for John wrote his Gospel in extreme old age—as, looking back along the line of half a century of toil and woe, he recalls that scene of his early youth, and with fond and affectionate pride records—what he alone notices—the very marked reception which he saw Jesus give to his friend, when they were as yet both strangers to him. For it is John

who tells us, that when Andrew introduced his brother to Jesus, the Lord said, "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is, by interpretation, A stone." It is John who tells this; and as we read, we feel glad that, of all the evangelists, it is John who tells it.

Passing the marriage at Cana in Galilee, at which some have imagined that they could recognise John in the bridegroom, and possibly Peter also in the ruler of the feast, we find them together beside the Lake of Galilee, plying their hereditary trade as fishers, and called henceforth to be fishers of men, (Luke v.)

The two ships were in company,—Peter, the owner of the one, and Zebedee, the father of John, the master of the other, being probably associates in business as well as private friends. For the families seem to have been neighbourly and intimate; Peter and his brother Andrew, on the one hand—James and John, with their father Zebedee, on the other. They were accustomed to go up to the feasts at Jerusalem together. When there, they frequented the ministry of the Baptist together in the wilderness of Judea. They thus became acquainted with Jesus together; and though some time elapsed between their first making his acquaintance, and their being summoned to follow him as his disciples,—a year, as most reckon, during which they carried on their ordinary occupations,—yet doubtless, all the while, they had much communing together respecting the extraordinary person

to whom the Baptist had introduced them as the Messiah. And as they continued to hear of him, and even frequently to meet with him, they had their expectations of some great and glorious discovery, about to break upon the world, wound up to the highest pitch.

Thus their intimacy must have become closer; the sons of Jonas—Peter and Andrew—being much in company, both for work and conversation, with their more youthful associates, the sons of Zebedee. And in particular, notwithstanding a very considerable disparity of years, Peter, as it would appear, was contracting an ardent friendship for John, which John as ardently returned.

Of the other brothers—Andrew, Peter's brother, and James, the brother of John—but little comparatively is known. That they were highly esteemed by their colleagues, and highly honoured—James especially—by their Master, sufficiently appears from what afterwards occurred in the course of their attendance upon Jesus. But already we have discovered something like an indication of the strong and special tie that knit Peter and John in one. And reflecting back some of the light of subsequent and more tender disclosures, on that early transaction of the miraculous draught of fishes, we seem to see John gazing, with deepest emotion, on the Being at whose knees Simon Peter, with characteristic promptness, has fallen down, and entering with fullest sympathy into the impetuous exclamation, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke v. 8),—the same John,

who himself long, very long afterwards, in the lonely Isle of Patmos, when he saw the same Lord in his risen glory, "fell at his feet as dead" (Rev. i. 17).

Thus summoned together to forsake all and follow Jesus, they were thereafter never separate. During the whole of our Lord's ministry he kept these two disciples very near his person—nearer, as we may fairly gather from the narrative, than all the rest of his chosen followers. It is always Peter and John whom we find using the greatest freedom in speaking to him. And if Jesus did draw John closer to his bosom, as the disciple whom he loved, it was for Simon Peter that, with a special interest in his most interesting character, his Master prayed, that in the critical hour of Satan's sifting trial his faith might not fail (Luke xxii. 32). They were colleagues, not only in the apostleship or company of the twelve, who were with Jesus in his public labours, but in that more exclusive triumvirate, or band of three, whom he made his standing, select, and triple staff of witnesses to the more private incidents of his mediatorial work. Following out the maxim of Moses, "that at the mouth of two or three witnesses everything is to be established," the Lord invested with a peculiar character, for that end, Peter and the sons of Zebedee; that such particulars of his ministry as, for good reasons, he wished to have concealed during his life-time, might, after his death, be attested by a competent number of credible men, not limited to the very lowest amount of testimony barely allowed by law, yet not extended beyond what

would be fully acknowledged on all hands to be sufficient.

Hence the two friends, with James, who was to them both as a common brother, were thrown much together. More particularly, not to speak at present of the raising of Jairus' daughter, they were the only persons present on the mount of the transfiguration and in the garden of the agony.

And oh! what a depth of joint insight into all that is glorious in heaven, and all that is terrible in hell, must these men ever after have had, to make them one,—one in a sense unknown to common friendship,—one as the thrilling ecstasy of heaven's love, and the shuddering horror of hell's unutterable hatred, may be imagined to make souls one. To have stood together, within that glorious cloud which overshadowed them on the mount, —to have sunk together under the overwhelming drowsiness with which the heavy and mysterious sorrow of that fatal night in the garden seemed to have charged and loaded the very air;—what gorgeous day-dreams of youth, shared together—what dark and dreary cup of woe, drained together,—ever had such power to be a bond of friendship as these experiences?

Especially in after years, when the real meaning of these transactions came to be better known to themselves, and when they were left alone,—James, the brother of John, having been slain with the sword (Acts xii. 2),—with what bursting fulness of heart may we conceive of Peter dwelling on that glorious scene, of which none now on earth, but only himself and John, can speak! "For

we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount" (2 Pet. i. 16-18).

Peter is anticipating his departure, as he says, "Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me" (ver. 14). A cruel martyrdom is before him, and having long lived with an eye to it, he now feels it to be near at hand. But to him the bitterness of death is past. It was past so soon as he learned, under the Spirit's teaching, the awful import of his Master's agonizing cries, as well as of his own and his friends' irresistible drowsiness in the garden, on that night when it was as the very gate of hell. And now it is a brighter vision that fills his soul. The Lord, who then gave vent to strong crying and tears, is coming in glory. For it is no fable this, cunningly devised; it had been miserable folly to follow a fable. To Peter, it is an actually seen and witnessed reality. It had been given to him, as he rejoices to declare, to behold the very glory in which the Lord is coming. And with what thoughts of inexpressible tenderness towards John—John, so soon to be the sole survivor of the three who had been witnesses of it—does Peter make this reference to the transfiguration of the Lord! For doubtless he has John full in his mind and on his heart. He

is about to leave him behind in the world,—to leave him perhaps, for anything he knows, till the Lord come again; yet, in any event, not to leave or lose him for ever. What emotions, what recollections, what hopes, must have been gushing forth within him, when embracing, as it were, his long-tried and dearly-loved friend in his arms once more, the old man gave utterance to these noble words: 'We—John and I—have not followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We were ourselves together eye-witnesses of his majesty!'

Many circumstances of resemblance, and bonds of intimacy, might be pointed out as occurring in the dealings which their Master had with the two disciples severally, and they with him, during the ordinary course of his ministry. For there is a similarity in these particulars not always noticed.

Did the Lord, for instance, see in Simon such a temper of mind, or did he foresee in regard to him such a turn of destiny, as to warrant his being named Cephas, or Peter—a stone, the rock—whether in reference to his indomitable strength of resolution, or to the services he was to render in the first founding of the Church? Did he not, also, give to John and his brother James, on similar considerations, the perhaps even more expressive name of Boanerges, or Sons of Thunder? James, alas! lived too short a time after the Lord's departure to verify the appellation. It must have been John, therefore, especially that the title was meant to note and characterize,

as destined to show himself vehement and bold in his Master's cause, and powerful in dealing with his Master's foes.

Peter, on one occasion, incurred the Lord's displeasure, and received his stern rebuke—"Get thee behind me, Satan"—when, giving utterance to his feelings of personal attachment to the Saviour, with little or no regard to the work and ministry which he came to accomplish, he would have stood in the way of his going up to Jerusalem (Matt. xvi. 23). It was very much the same spirit that moved John and his brother James to propose that the inhospitality of the Samaritans, who would not give the Saviour passage through their town, should be visited with swift resentment, and that fire from heaven should be called down to destroy them. The Lord turned and rebuked them, and said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke ix. 55, 56). It was the same love to Christ's person, generous, disinterested, and even violent, but without enough of intelligent sympathy with his mission, that made John propose to avenge the insult put upon him by others, and moved Peter to seek to lay an arrest upon his purpose of going up to Jerusalem to die.

Again, the forwardness of Peter to profess his attachment to the Lord, and to claim pre-eminence in respect of fidelity over his fellows—"Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Though I should die with thee, I will not deny thee" (Matt. xxvi. 33, 35)—has its parallel not only in the

ambitious proposal of the sons of Zebedee, that they should have the first place in the Lord's kingdom, sitting at his right hand and at his left, but also, and especially, in the fearlessness of their reply to the question which the Lord then put to them: "Can ye drink of my cup, and be baptized with my baptism? They say unto him, We can" (Mark x. 38, 39).

Even the weakness of Peter, brought out in his yielding under the very trials of his faith he had himself courted, —as in the instances of his walking on the water, and his denial of the Lord,—would seem to have its corresponding feature in the character and conduct of John; if at least, as many think, John is the young man spoken of by Mark who followed Jesus at first with seeming courage when he was apprehended, but afterwards, being himself laid hold on, left his upper garment and fled (Mark xiv. 51).

Altogether, there is surely more congeniality of natural temperament between Peter and John, as well as more agreement in their spiritual experience, and in the progress of their faith and love, than is often supposed. For there is a vague notion in the minds of not a few respecting John, that a certain unmingled sweetness and mild amiability of character distinguished him as the disciple whom Jesus loved. He is regarded very generally as a man of soft and sentimental, and almost feminine tenderness, having in his composition something of what David, as we have seen, attributes in his lamentation to Jonathan, when he says, "Very pleasant hast thou been unto me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women."

That John should even be compared with Peter, or placed on the same footing, may seem to some offensive; so much are they accustomed to conceive of Peter as a hard, common-place, every-day sort of character,—the very opposite of the refined, and somewhat romantic, ethereal, and transcendental quietism, which they are pleased to ascribe to the gentle spirit of John. There is an idea, also, that the writings of John, like himself, breathe only mildness, suavity, and serenity; those of Peter being comparatively rugged and harsh.

Now, we are far from denying that there was a real difference between them. It is brought out both in their manner of acting and in their style of writing. Peter evidently was a man of a more practical understanding and active temperament than John; inquisitive, alert, hasty; expert in the use of arguments; prompt in deciding and speaking; ready for emergencies, and fertile in expedients. John, again, was of a deeper and calmer, and perhaps slower, mood; swayed more by inward emotional feeling than by mere reason or external impulse; deliberate, therefore, rather than abrupt, and not fluctuating, but uniform and consistent. Still, there is in both the same under-current, strong and clear, of warm and even passionate devotion; frank, unselfish, single-eyed; —only it seems as if, in the one, the stream met with more eddies, rocks, and cross currents; while, in the other, it ran in a less broken channel.

Their respective writings, if carefully studied together, might bear out this comparison. John, indeed, in his epistles, seems to know no theme but love, and in his

gospel he opens the very heart of the loving Saviour; while Peter's letters turn more on the business of the Christian life,—its hard work and its rude trials. But where, in all the Bible, are there more enthusiastic outbursts of tenderness than that of Peter: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory"? (1 Pet. i 8.) Nor is this a solitary example, for many other similar instances of sublimity might be quoted. And as to John, if severity, wrath, and terror, are to be found anywhere in the word of God, let the beloved disciple's writings be searched for such qualities. Not Peter's sword cutting off the ear of the high priest's servant is sharper than John's rebuke, when he indignantly denounces the pre-eminence-loving Diotrephes, and debars every heretic from the house and home of a believer, and forbids any to pray for the unpardonable sin (3 John 10; 2 John 10; 1 John v. 16).

The truth is, there is a fallacy abroad, and an ingenious self-deception is practised by certain minds, by means of the distinction which they would fain draw between the milder and more amiable apostle, and him whom they put aside as "made of sterner stuff." It is like the preference which some affect to give to the Gospels above the Epistles, or to the New Testament above the Old, or to the gentleness of James above the hard sayings of Paul. It is like what we sometimes see in common life;—a worldly man attempting to set off the meekness of a retiring saint against the fire and fervour of a hard-fighting soldier in Christ's host. He is partial, it seems,

to what is serene and sweet; he loves repose, and dislikes all that looks like haste, or hurry, or violence. If Christianity were all modelled after the pattern of a weeping Magdalene or a mystical Madonna, it might be tolerable; but your men of rude speech and action break the spell and dissolve all the charm.

It is a most suspicious compliment, however, that these would-be Christians pay to the devotees whom they profess to admire. For themselves, they are but seeking, like those of whom the children in the market-place complained, to cast the blame of their rejection of the gospel on something wrong in the manner of presenting it, and not on what they are conscious is the real cause, —its deep distastefulness to their own evil hearts of unbelief. And, as regards the style of piety which they pretend to honour at the expense of that which really disturbs them more,—they little understand how entirely at heart Peter and John understand and sympathize with each other, and are in everything at one. For surely, if there be in Peter any of the uncompromising, rugged, stubborn sternness which his name of the Rock might indicate; there is a fire in John's bosom, and a bolt in his hand, that amply justify his appellation of a Son of Thunder.

XV.

THE FRIENDSHIP OF PETER AND JOHN.

"Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me."—JOHN xxi. 20–22.

PART SECOND.

IT is no ordinary friendship that we are tracing, no common-place acquaintanceship or familiarity, when we make a study of the intimacy between Peter and John. How the friendship first arose—whether from contiguity and neighbourhood of residence, or similarity of occupation, or community of taste, or, as we might say, mere accident and casual circumstances—it would be idle to conjecture, and not very profitable, even if it were possible, to discover; nor need we regret much our inability to determine the probable nature and degree of their fellowship, before they met with Jesus and became his followers. Afterwards, as we have seen, they had enough of experience in common to knit them together in the closest and most confidential union. Their common alacrity in consenting together to forsake all for Christ and to wait upon his ministry, their common sight of his glory on the mount, and their common participation in his agony in the garden,—these formed bonds of mutual sympathy as strong as they were strange. And a certain subdued

congeniality of temper, amid great diversities, calling forth the same kind of rebukes on the part of their Master, as well as the same kind of lessons and encouragements, was fitted to make them intimately and thoroughly one.

The real value of this unity may be seen most evidently, as it appears to us,—First, In what passed between them as their Master's life on earth drew towards its close; and, Secondly, In the brief but emphatic notice of the separation awaiting the two friends, with which, after his resurrection, the Lord wound up his conversation with Peter concerning John.

I. The close of their Master's life brought Peter and John very much together. As Jesus drew near to the city to eat his last passover, these were the two disciples whom he sent on before him to make the needful preparation: "And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat" (Luke xxii. 8). At the paschal supper itself, when Jesus, troubled in spirit, made the melancholy announcement that one of the twelve should betray him,—amid the blank astonishment and dismay that sat on every face, as, looking one to another, they doubted of whom he spake,—we find Peter beckoning, or making a signal, to the disciple whom Jesus loved, that he should ask the Lord, on whose bosom he was leaning, "Lord, who is it?"—a trifling incident in itself, but characteristic, on the one hand, of Peter's readiness of resource,—for it was quite like him to suggest the expedient that might

end the terrible suspense; and, on the other hand, indicating the footing on which the two apostles were, and the sort of telegraphic and electric understanding that subsisted between them: "Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, He it is to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon" (John xiii. 23-26).

Let us imagine such a sympathy as this would imply, between Peter and John. Let us conceive of the beloved disciple—himself reposing on the bosom of his Master, and drinking in his words of deep sorrow, yet of infinite love—as he catches the eye of his anxious and excited friend. A momentary suspicion flashes through his mind, as he detects some trembling—perhaps some vacillation—in the eager look. Instantly he is aroused; and taking advantage of his position, and of his Master's acknowledged partiality, he hastens to set a bursting heart at rest, and to relieve Peter of his fears.

From the supper there is an adjournment to the garden, where together they are found yielding to the oppressive sorrow of the scene. And immediately thereafter, there follow in quick succession, like the incidents in a dream, the arrest of Jesus, his trial, his crucifixion, and his burial.

And all throughout this tragedy, Peter and John are together.

If John be indeed the young man of whom Mark speaks (xiv. 51, 52), who fled, leaving his upper garment, as he was laid hold of in following Jesus,—he soon repented and returned. For there is little doubt that he was the individual who introduced Peter into the palace of the high priest (John xviii. 15, 16). We gather this from the style and manner of the description, compared with this evangelist's usual way of indicating himself. What interest or influence he had with the high priest's officers, or how he was known to the high priest himself, does not appear. It is supposed by some, that Zebedee, his father, was a man of wealth and consideration, and that, personally, John held a somewhat distinguished rank or position among his countrymen. But be that as it may, he has evidently the means of entering himself into the hall where his Master is to be tried, and of procuring admission for his companion and friend (John xviii. 15, 16).

Ah! little did John think, when he executed for Peter this commission of common civility, that the issue was to be so disastrous and deplorable. But the trial goes on. Peter is betrayed into the cowardly sin of denying his Master; and John, who was instrumental unadvisedly in introducing him to the scene of temptation, has the deep mortification of witnessing his friend's disgrace. But he catches a glimpse of what is in the eye of the Lord, as he turns and looks upon Peter. And he sees, also, the tears already gushing, as he goes out, from the smitten penitent's eye.

Shall we say that he makes haste to follow him? or rather, as we shortly after find John at the foot of the

cross, receiving the charge which, in the midst of all his own agony, the son of Mary committed to him, "Mother, behold thy son; Son, behold thy mother," shall we say, that after leading that mother to his own house, and soothing her poignant grief as best he might, he bethought himself of his fallen friend, and went in search of Peter, whom he had seen, under the piercing yet melting glance of their common Master's eye, going out to weep bitterly? Certain it is, that we find Peter and John together on the morning of the resurrection (John xx. 1, 2). And they are together, as it would seem, not casually or suddenly, but by design and on set purpose. Have they been together all the time, since their Lord was laid in his silent tomb? And how have they been spending that dismal interval?

O Christian friendship! how precious art thou! When the Saviour is in the grave, and Peter, disconsolate and despairing, is brooding over his base treachery—and that last look of the Holy One, which, beaming with kindness, all the more on that account cut him to the heart,—thou, O Divine Consolation! thou bringest to him one dearer than a brother; younger in years, but how tender in sympathy! It is John; who amid the overwhelming sorrow of that hour—with the grief of witnessing the cruel torture of Him who loved him full in his bosom, and upon his hands the care of her who was now to be his mother, as she had been the mother of his Lord—has yet leisure to remember the claims of brotherly affection, and to seek out and console his fallen but much loved friend.

We might here give imagination the reins; but we forbear. The sacred history has wrapt in deep and unbroken gloom the period that intervened between the burial and the resurrection of the Lord; nor is it for us to break the silence of these nights and that day, when it might seem as if all creation were hushed in intense expectancy till it should be seen whether Heaven or Hell had gained the victory,—whether the sacrifice so marvellously offered would prove fruitless, or would win acceptance and salvation. But the fact that, during that awful pause, John was with Peter, and that they were found together on the third morning, is in itself enough—it speaks volumes. What might be their converse, who can guess? "We did trust," they might be sadly saying to one another, "that it was he that should have redeemed Israel." But he is gone,—it may be for ever; and all seems to be lost. Hope is withered, and, for our consolation, memory is all that now remains;—memory, in John, of that last endearment at the supper; in Peter, of that last offence at the trial. And yet, friendship can blend the two. The bosom on which John leaned, the eye that looked upon Peter, are now common in the sad retrospect to both. They mourn, in their sad bereavement and bitter penitence, together.

And now the morning is come. The dreary Sabbath is over, and the first day of the week begins to dawn. The friends are together still, when the strange tidings reach them of the women having gone to the tomb and found it empty, and having received a message from angels. Together the two disciples rush, with eager feet,

to verify the news. The youthful John outstrips his partner in the race, and is first at the empty sepulchre; where he pauses to gaze, and wonder, and mourn. The more impetuous Peter, arriving breathless at the spot, waits not a moment to reconnoitre outside, but promptly leads the way within. John as promptly follows. And in a moment the minds of both are opened to an apprehension of the marvellous event that has occurred. Together they own the Scriptures fulfilled, as the light of the glorious doctrine of the resurrection flashes simultaneously on their understandings; and, wondering at their former blindness, they encourage one another in the belief that the promised Christ must indeed rise again from the dead,—and that this Jesus, their beloved Master, is the Christ. The whole scene is as characteristic as it is interesting and instructive (John xx. 1–10).

Little more remains to be added on the subject of this friendship between Peter and John. That it was prolonged into their future lives and ministries, after the Church began to be formed, is sufficiently apparent from the history in the book of Acts. Thus, we read of Peter and John going up together to the temple, on the occasion on which the lame man was healed, "at the gate which is called Beautiful" (Acts iii. 1–11). Again, we see them cast into prison together, and then brought before the council to be examined. And we have their joint reply, so nobly given when they were "commanded not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus:" "Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more

than unto God, judge ye" (Acts iv. 19). We find them, also, associated together in a mission to the Church in Samaria which Philip was instrumental in planting: "Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost" (Acts viii. 14, 15). And finally, along with James, "Cephas and John" are mentioned by Paul as joint pillars in the church at Jerusalem; and, in that character, giving to him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship (Gal. ii. 9).

Thus throughout, to the very last, we have incidental traces, slight in themselves, but significant when taken together, of the close association and constant personal intimacy of these two holy men. And we feel justified therefore, on the whole, and upon scriptural grounds, in the view which we have been giving of this close and blessed friendship between Peter and John.

II. But we cannot conclude without adverting, in connection with this subject of the friendship of these apostles, to a few points brought out in the concluding chapter of John's Gospel; and especially to what is there recorded as having passed between Peter and his Master, relative to the fate of John.

The very writing of this chapter, it would almost seem, is to be regarded as a tribute of friendship, on the part of John, to the memory of his beloved and now departed comrade, Peter. It was, as is generally

lieved, the last task on earth of the disciple whom Jesus loved, to prepare his Gospel. Moved and inspired by the Holy Ghost, he gave to this work the latest days of his lengthened life. And what more congenial occupation could he have had assigned to him? He had addressed to the Church at large, as well as to individuals, letters of warning, affectionate and faithful, against the deadly errors of that time, when men were already beginning to deny, or explain away, all the reality of the atonement made by Christ, and the renewal wrought by the Spirit. He had put on record the revelation of all things about to happen on the earth, down to the era of the Lord's appearing in glory, and the establishment of his glorious heavenly kingdom. And now, on the near verge of the grave, with his foot on the very confines of the eternal world, he is summoned to live over again, in inspired recollection, and in minute detail, those three youthful years of his personal fellowship with the Lord, which to him are worth uncounted ages.

Blessed toil! nay, rather rapturous enjoyment! How does he throw his whole soul into it, and linger over it, feeling as if he never could have done!

Notice, for instance, the close of the 20th chapter: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (ver. 30, 31). Plainly, the venerable writer was then laying down his pen. It is the formal finishing of the book. But he cannot tear

himself away; he cannot bring himself to say, Farewell. There are more last words to utter; there is a postscript —an appendix—a supplement to add. He resumes the pen; he has omitted something of interest and value; he has to rear a monument more durable than brass, not only to his Master, but to his Master's friend, and his own.

For who can doubt that it is partly, at least, as a memorial of Peter that this extra matter in the 21st chapter is given? The whole chapter is about Peter. And with what exquisite tact and taste, with what tenderness and what truth, is Peter sketched to us in this affecting picture!

We see him standing beside John on the vessel's side, when, at the command of Jesus, as yet unrecognised, the net is let down, and the multitude of fishes taken. John is the first to discern who this seeming stranger is; and his eager whisper to Simon Peter, "It is the Lord," is characteristic of the disciple whom Jesus loved. Equally characteristic is it of Peter himself that he is the first to act on the hint, and impetuously cast himself into the sea, in his haste to meet the Master whom he had so recently denied.

Ah! the blessedness of that bitter weeping! How is it turned into joy! But for those gracious, relenting drops, of which the Lord's eye, as he turned and looked on him, unlocked the fountain and source within, Peter must have shrunk from encountering him again. He must have fled, like Judas, to despair and suicide. But now there is an attraction in the very Saviour whom he

has pierced, drawing Peter towards him. He hastens to embrace him: and well is his haste recompensed!

In the interview that follows, the Lord addresses himself to Peter alone. All the past is buried in oblivion; forgiveness begets love; much forgiveness, much love. The fallen apostle is restored; the shepherd's crook is again put into his hand,—the martyr's crown is suspended over his head. And it is John who tells it all! (chap. xxi. 15-18.)

Is it not fitly reserved for John to tell it? He, as well as the other evangelists, is to record his friend's fall; but he alone is to have the satisfaction of recording his friend's recovery. Was ever monument to friendship more precious? Was ever friendship more worthy of such a monument?

Nor is it, we may well believe, without emotion, that in winding up his whole history once more, John notices the proof of affectionate interest which Peter gave, when, in the very midst of such close personal dealing of the Lord with his conscience, and such peculiar experience as might have engrossed his whole soul, he yet found leisure to remember his friend. Peter might have been excused had he thought merely of himself in such a crisis. But that was not his nature. The beloved disciple is beside him; and, as if remembering and returning the kind service rendered on the night when during supper John questioned the Lord at Peter's suggestion—"Who is it, Lord?"—Peter now, on his part, asks the Lord concerning John, "And what shall this man do?"

'What is to become of him? He has been lovely and

pleasant to me in life; are we, in death, to be divided? Thou hast engaged me to love thee, and thou knowest that I love thee,—good cause hast thou given me to love thee, and none but thee. Thou hast assigned to me my work: and most welcome work it is,—to feed thy lambs, —to feed thy sheep. Thou hast warned me of the death by which I am to glorify God; and though not now so foolhardy as once I was, and so ready to volunteer myself for martyrdom, I shrink not from what thou appointest. Thou hast given me that command, including all promises and all grace,—"Follow me;" and, Lord, thou wilt enable me to follow thee even unto death, and through death to glory. But what of my friend—my more than brother, whom thou, Lord, lovest, who leaned on thy breast at supper? Following thee, must I be parted from him? We were together when thou didst call us, at the first, to forsake all and follow thee; and together we left all the world behind, that we might bear thee company, and wait on thee. We have been together, he and I, ever since; and on that dreary day when thou wast in the tomb, and I, a miserable sinner, had seen, as I imagined, the last of thee, and seen thee in that look of thine that cut me to the heart, what, oh! what would have become of me, but for his sympathy with me in my unutterable sorrow? And now, can I be blamed for wanton or impertinent curiosity when I ask thee to satisfy me as to the future course of that friendship which hitherto has run so deep? It is not that I hesitate about following thee,—it is not that I draw back even from a cross like thine own; but this man, good

Lord, what of him? One word to alleviate the anxiety of friendship—of such a friendship; and I am ready—I am thine for ever!'

Can it possibly be an answer of stern reproof that the Lord, in such circumstances, returns to such an inquiry on the part of one with whom he has been dealing so closely and so graciously,—"If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me?" Nay; we confidently say it is not,—it cannot be so intended. We cannot believe that the Lord designs to upbraid Peter, or to take otherwise than in good part the affectionate solicitude of his friendly interest in John.

Some, indeed, would have this to be a rebuke of Peter's unwarrantable curiosity, a check given to his inquisitive turn of mind, which made him eager to learn the appointed destiny of a brother, instead of acquiescing in what the Lord had told him respecting his own. And in this view many edifying practical lessons may, no doubt, be deduced respecting the sin and folly of prying, or seeking to pry, into our neighbours' circumstances and affairs, and the propriety of attending to what more nearly concerns ourselves.

But there is surely more in this reply of our Lord than a mere censuring of his disciple's inquisitiveness. No doubt, it must have been sufficiently irritating, if at a time when his Master was dealing so very graciously, and so very pointedly, with his own soul, Peter manifested the spirit of a mere busybody in other men's matters. Still, anything like even the appearance of severity, after so tender a scene, jars on the feelings which that scene

awakens. Peter's question respecting John may have been dictated by some other and better motive than idle curiosity; and the answer of the Lord may have been designed to convey, not only a hint against the indulgence of such a temper, but a weightier and deeper lesson. It was as a warm friend, and not a frivolous, gossiping interloper, that Peter was moved, at such a crisis, to think of John so affectionately, and to inquire so earnestly, "What shall this man do?" And it was this friendly interest in a brother's fate that the Lord meant, not to suppress, but to turn into a right and comfortable channel, when he gave the somewhat abrupt and oracular response, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me" (xxi. 22).

What is there, then, in this reply? Upon what, at the time, would the full heart of Peter, eagerly and intently fasten?

The saying, as we are told, gave rise to a vague rumour that John was not to die: "Then went this saying abroad among the brethren that that disciple should not die." That disciple himself is anxious to show that what Jesus said to Peter warranted no such conclusion: "Yet Jesus said not to him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (xxi. 23). What the Lord's reply to Peter did not necessarily mean, John carefully explains. What it did mean, he does not say. One thing, however, is clear; it must, at all events, have conveyed to Peter the impression, that he was to leave John behind him on the earth. Whether his beloved friend was to die at last or not, he was to be exempt from

such a premature and violent death as his own was to be. 'John, it seems, is to live on after I am gone, and in a good old age his days on earth are to close tranquilly,—the current of his life flowing calmly into the ocean of eternity, either through the peaceful outlet of a natural decease or through the wide-opening portals of the gate that is to admit the King of glory.' Then be it so. Peter does not envy his friend, or grudge him any higher favour which the Lord may have destined for him. He is content,—it is nothing to him; he follows Jesus.

What! nothing to him who had but now so anxiously put the question, "What of this man?" Nothing, to be parted so cruelly from his friend whom he must leave behind,—perhaps till his Master's coming again?

No; for in that coming he, following Jesus, has a share. Peter may be snatched away by a bloody death before his time,—John may tarry till Jesus come. But what of that? It is but a little while, and "he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Hush then, Peter, thy earnest questioning concerning thy friend, who is to be spared when thou art taken. And thou, John, beloved disciple of thy Lord, be satisfied, if it so please him, to tarry till he come; yes, even when thy weary head would fain repose itself again on thy Master's bosom. It will be all one to thy friend and to thee, very soon. Peter has followed Jesus through martyrdom into his rest; thou tarriest, if he will, till he come. But all will be well then.

Thus the parting of Christian friends may lose its sharpest pang. They part to meet again, if not sooner, at

least when the Lord comes. The dying believer may be willing to depart,—the survivor may be contented to remain,—for the time is short, the world is passing away, and the Lord is at hand.

Am I summoned, like Peter, to follow Jesus into the unseen and undiscovered country whence no traveller e'er returns? and do I leave a beloved John behind? Still, to depart and to be with Christ is far better,—to be absent from the body and present with the Lord. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. Nor need the fate of the friend to whom I bid adieu concern me much. How long he is to tarry on this cold earth when I am gone is really nothing to me;—no, not even should it be appointed to him to tarry till the Lord come. For—oh! rapturous anticipation!—the Lord will come; and they that are his shall appear with him in glory; and the living that are tarrying for him shall be changed; and all shall be for ever with the Lord! Then, let me be willing to follow Jesus, however cruel may be the death by which I am to glorify God, and however dear the friend from whom I am constrained to part. Enough for me to know, that, let my death be ever so cruel, it is but following Jesus still,—following him through his tribulation into his glory; and let my friend tarry ever so long behind me, it can at the utmost be no longer than till Jesus come.

Am I called, on the other hand, like John, to witness the removal of some dear brother or venerable father in the Lord, and to tarry behind alone? Am I desolate and lonely, feeling as if life had now no object, and this world

no charm? Let me first call to remembrance, that "to me to live is Christ." Whosoever may be taken from me, the desire of my eyes, the delight of my soul,—still all is not a blank to me. I have something left to live for; —"To me to live is Christ." Then, as to those who fall asleep in Jesus, let me not ignorantly sorrow, even as others that have no hope. For if I believe that Jesus died and rose again, let me believe also that them which sleep in Jesus God will bring with him. Long time I may have to tarry after my best and dearest ones are gone. He whom they have followed through painful deaths, and whom I still seek to follow in my weary life, may will that I tarry till he come. Be it so. For he himself says, "Surely I come quickly: Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

XVI.

MARY MAGDALENE—WITH PETER AND JOHN AT THE SEPULCHRE.

JOHN xx. 1-18.

As a sequel to the sketch which we have been giving of the friendship between Peter and John,—a friendship growing all throughout their attendance on the Lord's ministry, and especially hallowed by its closing scenes,—we may find it interesting to notice what passed at the sacred sepulchre on the morning of the resurrection. And all the rather may this interest us, because it introduces another character, and places in a most affecting light the tenderness of another true penitent's heart. Mary,—surnamed Magdalene from the place of her birth or residence,—pre-eminent in sin and suffering, and in her debt of obligation for sin forgiven and suffering relieved, has the high honour conferred upon her of being among the first to hear of the risen Saviour, and the first to see himself. In this honour she has associated with her Peter and John; and thus these three together become the first witnesses of the fact of the resurrection.

In tracing the incidents of that memorable morning, we follow chiefly the narrative of the last of the four evangelists. His narrative is here, as usual, supplementary to those of the other three; and is, besides, more definitely directed to a special end. The object of John,

in all, his history, and especially in this portion of it, is not merely in general to record miscellaneously certain circumstances connected with the Lord's resurrection; but in particular to establish this precise truth,—that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," and that they who "believe have life through his name." With this view, he dwells chiefly on those features in this event, and on those sayings of his beloved Master, which tended to bring prominently forward the high dignity of his person, and the purpose of love for which he "died, and rose, and revived" (Rom. xiv. 9).

I. The first particular which the evangelist notices, is the arrival of Mary Magdalene at the tomb: "The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre" (John xx. 1).

Although John mentions Mary Magdalene, and none else by name, and gives no hint of any others being with her, he says nothing inconsistent with that supposition. He singles out Mary, because it is exclusively with what happened to her that he is concerned. But he does not assert, nor do his words at all imply, that she was alone. And we gather from the other narratives that she was not alone.

It must be confessed, indeed, that the harmony of the several evangelical accounts of the resurrection is by no means very clearly ascertained with any general consent, or unanimity of interpreters; and it would be unsafe and unwise to pronounce very positively on any point that

depends on an exact adjustment of independent testimonies, all consistent with one another, but evidently not intended to be reduced into one full and formal history. It is not difficult to prove that they need not be understood as contradicting one another,—that where their statements seem to conflict, a very little attention will suggest a sufficiently probable explanation, and show how they may be reconciled. But, on the other hand, it is to be remembered that the sacred narratives—being all of them of a fragmentary character, and consisting chiefly of incidental notices or reminiscences—may not, even when taken together, afford all the materials of a complete history. We would probably require to know more of what passed than all the four evangelists have told us, before we could assign to each circumstance exactly its proper place, and explain its relation to other matters. This consideration might be useful to all who attempt formally to harmonize the Gospels; and it may satisfy us in declining, in the present instance, to make the attempt at all. It is enough to observe, that in what the four histories record as to the resurrection, there is really no contradiction.

Mary Magdalene, then, came early in the morning, on the first day of the week, along with the other women who had been making preparations for anointing the body of Jesus. They had been saying to themselves, as they drew near the tomb, "Who shall roll us away the stone?" They found the stone already removed. On perceiving this, it would seem that Mary, without waiting to make any further examination, abruptly left her companions at

the grave, and hastened to carry this intelligence to the disciples: "Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him" (ver. 2). This is her inference from what she had seen. She is greatly agitated. The mere sight of the stone rolled away throws her into confusion; and the idea at once rushes into her mind, that the grave must have been rifled, and the Saviour's body taken away. Full of this impression, she runs into the city.

The other women, meanwhile, remain at the tomb. There they see, first one angel, and then two. One angel had descended previous to the arrival of the women: "And, behold, there had been a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it" (Matt. xxviii. 2, *marg. reading*). This angel had taken his station at first on the outside of the sepulchre; and thereafter, along with another heavenly visitor, he seems to have appeared to the women and conversed with them within the sepulchre. The two angels sat or stood within the sepulchre, on either side of the place where Jesus lay, varying their posture as they welcomed and addressed the women. With what passed between the angels and the company of women we are not now particularly concerned. The women received a gracious message to the disciples, and to Peter by name,—such tenderness was shown to the erring apostle. They were informed that the Lord had risen;

they were reminded of his having himself told them that he would rise, and that he would meet them in Galilee. And now, for the first time understanding the import of their Lord's prediction, they hastened to execute his commission, and to "bring the disciples word" (Matt. xxviii. 5-8; Mark xvi. 5-8; Luke xxiv. 3-10).

All this may have occupied some time after Mary Magdalene left them. For that she had parted company with them before their interview with the angels, immediately on perceiving the stone rolled away, is plain from what she says to Peter and the other disciple, who, as we have seen, was his friend John: "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him" (John xx. 2). This she could scarcely have said if she had heard the angels deliver their message. That message must have reassured her, as it reassured the other women: "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen." So the angels, or one of them, spoke. And the women, assured that he was "going before his disciples into Galilee, and that there they were to see him," "departed quickly from the sepulchre, with fear and great joy." Evidently Mary Magdalene had not received this assurance, when, immediately on seeing the stone removed, she hurried off with the tidings to Peter and John. She had not waited with the rest of the women. She could not stand the shock of this new and sudden disappointment. She, out of whom the Lord had cast seven devils —she, being forgiven much, loved much. What she suffered when the Lord whom she loved died on the

cross, who can conceive? Now, her whole heart is bent on honouring him, though dead. She has looked forward, with intense longing, to the hour when she may anoint the body of Jesus. Though crucified, he is still dear to her; and, by every token of grateful remembrance, she will testify her attachment. The moment when she is to render to him this last service is come. But the melancholy gratification is denied to her. She rushes from the open sepulchre, and gives vent to her bitter grief in that singularly affecting exclamation, "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him."

Shall we blame this poor mourner for her haste and precipitation? Had she lingered a little longer at the tomb; had she inquired more diligently, and searched all around more patiently; she might have learned something of Him whom she sought,—something better far than anything that she could have expected beforehand. If she had not found him where she sought him, she would at least have learned where she might seek and be sure of finding him now; and, above all, she would have been taught to look, not for a dead, but for a living Saviour. Shall we reflect upon her folly in depriving herself of this opportunity by so abruptly quitting the scene where she might have hoped, if she had persevered, ere long to be satisfied? Shall we not rather rejoice that she is led so soon to return to it? They to whom she flies to unburden all her grief, happily direct her, by their example, in the right way; for they hasten to the spot, and, as we shall soon see, she herself hastens after them.

If she erred in yielding to her disappointment too easily, her error is speedily repaired. If she left the place of the Lord's burial too hastily, she is immediately brought back to it again.

Is there ever a time when, in any measure, your experience is analogous to hers? You have come—very lately, perhaps—to the sepulchre, on the first day of the week, on a communion Sabbath. You have come to contemplate your Lord in his death, and to perform a simple and touching service in remembrance of him. You intended to do him honour, and you expected to enjoy a certain meditative and mournful pleasure in thus showing your attachment to your crucified Lord. You have been disappointed. You have not received those impressions which you thought would be made on you; nor have you, to your own satisfaction, been able to render that homage and service which you proposed. You feel as if you had come to discharge a pious office, and had found nothing but an empty form. And now you are ready to complain that your devotion has been all in vain.

We would not, in such a case, inquire too particularly what your views and anticipations may have been. You may have come under the impulse of a kind of natural feeling,—a blind and vague desire to testify, in this way, your regard and reverence for Him who died on the cross, having but a very imperfect and inadequate idea of the terms on which you should have been looking and waiting for him. You may have come, as you imagined, to discharge a debt or duty of gratitude, with but little appre-

hension of the real nature of the service for which you have to be grateful—with but little intelligent or spiritual faith in Jesus, as delivered for your offences, and raised again for your justification. But whatever may have been your purpose in coming, if only you came honestly and in sincerity, we would not now upbraid you. It may be matter of regret, however, that you have too hastily withdrawn yourselves from the scene and the subject to which you recently resorted; and it may be a good deed to lead you back to those memorials of the Saviour's death which you have somewhat too abruptly left. Return again to the place where your Lord lay,—return even to the empty sepulchre. Resume your meditations on that death which you have so lately been commemorating. Place yourselves once more in the position which you then occupied. Pursue the studies, prosecute the inquiries, in which you were then engaged. Go with Peter and his companion, and the Magdalene—go anew to the tomb. Give yourselves anew to devout thought respecting all the wondrous issues of the decease which was accomplished at Jerusalem. And, in prayer, and patience, and faith, await the clearer discoveries that may be made to you, and the deeper impressions under which you may be brought.

II. The second particular noticed by this evangelist, is the visit of Peter and another disciple to the sepulchre. That other disciple was John himself. The incident here narrated is, in all its circumstances, peculiarly characteristic. That the two brethren, on hearing the strange tidings which Mary had to tell, should hasten to satisfy

themselves as to the real state of the case, was just what might have been expected. That in running John should outstrip Peter, was not surprising, if we consider both the greater youth of John and the warm enthusiasm of his love to Jesus. That Peter, again, though coming last to the tomb, should be the first to enter in, is precisely in accordance with his usual forwardness and the natural impetuosity of his spirit: "Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he, stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead" (John xx. 3-9).

The beloved disciple bent down to examine the sepulchre. The body, it clearly enough appeared, was no longer there. But a remarkable circumstance presented itself. The linen clothes were lying—in decent order. The body, then, had not been carried off by enemies; for they could not have rifled the tomb without leaving some traces of violence. Neither had it been removed by friends—as by Joseph of Arimathea or by Nicodemus—intending to bury it in another place more deliberately and more honourably than time permitted them to do on

the evening on which he died; for even in that case the clothes would not have been left lying, since they would have been needed wherever the body was taken. Here, then, is a startling appearance meeting the eye of John.

He pauses. Is it in perplexity—in amazement? or does a faint surmise, a supposition of the truth, come into his mind? Can it be? The beloved disciple is filled with awe,—he is profoundly moved,—and he stands as if fixed and rooted to the spot. But his more eager and practically energetic friend now joins him. At once, and without hesitation, Peter proceeds to ascertain how the matter stands. He enters, followed by John; and they find, on a closer and more careful examination, that in very truth the clothes are so arranged as to preclude the idea of the body having been removed by any human hand. The inference immediately flashes upon them; and now, at last, for the first time they understand "the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead."

What a light then burst upon these followers of Jesus, amid the darkness of their Master's silent and vacant grave! How must they have marvelled at their own strange insensibility! Awakened as from a trance,—roused from the stupor of a dream,—they feel the scales falling from their eyes and a new world opening to their view. The resurrection of Jesus! this, now that they realize it, is a new idea,—and of how many new ideas is it the source! Strange that they should not have apprehended it before. Is there not here the element of a new life,—of new faith,—of new hope?

And not the least remarkable feature in this process of

conviction and awakening is the fact, that it is wrought without any extraordinary or miraculous interposition,—by the simple contemplation of what might have been regarded as an immaterial circumstance, or an unimportant accident. There is no vision of angels granted to the two apostles; these heavenly attendants seem to have withdrawn themselves while Peter and John were at the sepulchre. They are not to receive direct intimation of their Lord's having risen, from any divine messenger. The Spirit of God needs not always such instrumentality. By means far more insignificant, yet in his hands equally effectual, he can enlighten and awaken men: and the slightest incidental hint he can so impress upon the understanding, and so apply to the conscience, that it shall work conviction as swift, and as sure, and as satisfying, as any herald from the skies could do.

What is to hinder his working such conviction in you? You may need it as much as did Peter and John. When you came to deal with the memorials of your Lord's death, you may have been, to all practical and spiritual purposes, almost, if not altogether, as ignorant as they were. It is true you knew the fact of the Lord's resurrection, and as a matter of history you believed it. But as a matter of doctrine, or as a matter of experience, did you understand, did you apprehend, did you realize it? Did you perceive all its bearings on the death which preceded it, and on the glory which followed it?—how it seals to you the efficacy of that death as a full atonement for all your sins, and opens to you the prospect of that glory as the everlasting portion of your bodies and your souls?

Come, see the place where your Lord lay; see it as reminding you that he is not here,—he is risen. That which, at a communion-table, you might touch and taste and handle as his body, is now gone; the outward drapery which covered it is decently preserved,—the linen clothes, as it were, are wrapped together and laid in an orderly manner aside. Ah! if you came at all with carnal and worldly views,—seeking to honour Christ by any merely bodily service, or to enjoy him in any merely sensible way,—may you not now, by this token, be made to know the scripture, that he must needs rise from the dead, and that you must rise with him? Seek no longer, then, the living among the dead. Let your eyes and your hearts be opened to the reality of his life, as well as to the remembrance of his death; and consider well that it is with a living Saviour that you have now to do. You are not merely to pay decent respect to his death,—anointing, as it were, and honouring his body—gratefully remembering his dying love—as a thing past and gone, of which only the memorials are present. By these very memorials, as lively signs and tokens, you must be moved to enter into the meaning of his resurrection, as justifying you from all your iniquity, and raising you to newness of life. Muse not merely on the death of Christ—indulging those natural emotions of pity and remorse which it is fitted to call forth,—nor think that, when you have come to pay your tribute of homage at his tomb, all is over, and you may either sit down disconsolate, or go back to the vain world again. No; let the empty sepulchre and the linen clothes lying—let the

ordinances on earth, so soon found to be in themselves vacant and formal—remind you that he is risen, that he has broken the bands of spiritual death, and opened to you the gates of eternal life. And let this thought revive and reanimate your souls, dispel the vapours and the gloom of earth, and rouse you to the pursuit of heavenly glory.

III. Thus instructed, "the disciples went away again unto their own home" (ver. 10). But another mourner still remains to be consoled; for we return once more to Mary Magdalene. She had followed Peter and John to the tomb; and, as they ran swiftly, she probably did not reach it till they had gone away again unto their own home. It is not likely, either that she was with them at the sepulchre, or that she met them by the way on their return; else surely they would have imparted to her some of their own reviving confidence. We are to remember in all this narrative, that between the sepulchre and the city there must have been many different roads and streets; so that parties going and coming, especially to and from different parts of the city, might easily miss one another. So perhaps it happened in this instance. Peter and John had left the sepulchre before Mary reached it; and she came without having encountered them going to their own home.

Thus she found herself alone at the sepulchre; all human counsel and human companionship seemed to have failed her. She stood without at the sepulchre weeping. Now for the first time she stooped to look into the

sepulchre. The angels, guardians of the place where Jesus lay, had returned to their post: "But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain" (ver. 11, 12). For while the apostles apparently were left to judge for themselves, it was the women,—to whom, perhaps on account of their deeper dejection and more lively feeling of disappointment, such ministry was more necessary,—it was the women,—first those whom Mary Magdalene in her haste left at the tomb, and then Mary Magdalene herself on her return to the tomb,—it was the women, and not the apostles, who were favoured with the sight and converse of angels.

These heavenly messengers, touched with Mary's sorrow, tendered their sympathy, asking affectionately, "Woman, why weepest thou?" She answers almost in the very words which she had addressed to Peter and John, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him" (ver. 13).

Oh woman! thy love is strong. The dead, the crucified body of thy Lord—what wouldst thou give to see it once more? To all whom thou meetest, to all who find thee, thy language is still the same, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?"

What follows is too simple and touching to admit of comment: "And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not

that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master" (ver. 14-16).

How blessed is this recognition! Mary, turning half round from the tomb, sees Jesus at first but indistinctly. In the early dawn, and amid her blinding tears, she merely perceives that a man is standing beside her. Absorbed in her own grief, she mechanically hears and answers the question of the stranger, naturally enough imagining that it must be the gardener; for he alone could be supposed to have business there at that early hour. A single word dispels her sad stupor. Jesus calls her by name,—"Mary;" and the well-known accents of love reach her heart. Yes, it is her Lord; to whom instinctively, as of old, she addresses the prompt reply of recognition and loving devotion, "Rabboni, Master."

Surely this Mary too, as well as the other Mary, is "highly favoured among women." Not an angel merely, but the Lord himself salutes her. To her first he appears after he is risen—to her, out of whom he had cast seven devils. And now, it might seem, her soul has found rest. Her mourning is turned into joy. She has found him whom her soul loveth. She will hold him, and not let him go.

But stay, yet again there is another disappointment.

The Lord seems to put her away from him: "Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (ver. 17).

What can this mean? Is there any mystery here connected with the nature of the Lord's risen body, as if it were of too spiritual and ethereal a mould to be pressed by mortal hand? Certainly the body of Jesus was changed, as is plain from the manner in which, after his resurrection, he appeared and disappeared, concealed and revealed himself. But it was not so changed that it might not be handled. It was his real body, consisting of real flesh and bones. Jesus permitted the other women, when he met them, to embrace him. Why, then, did he say to Mary, "Touch me not?"

Surely he had some lesson to teach her. He was not merely, as some say, in haste to dismiss her, that she might carry his message to the disciples; nor did he mean, as others suggest, to hurry her abruptly away, with the assurance that she would have other opportunities of embracing him, because he was not yet ascended. If this had been all that he intended, he might have allowed time for so brief and simple an act of homage and of love. There is more in his answer than any such supposition implies. He is dealing with Mary as a disciple; he has a lesson to teach her; he has an end in view connected with her peace and her holiness. In a word, he has to reconcile her to the idea of his ascension: "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father."

For that idea is new to her. Mary, like the other disciples, when she admitted the thought of the Lord having come back to life, seems at once to have rushed to the conclusion that he was come back permanently to remain,—that he was now to abide among them, and to fulfil at last all their expectations. It was probably under this impression that the apostles afterwards put to him the question, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts i. 6.) Mary, we may well believe, did not care so much for the temporal glories of the kingdom whose establishment they then expected. But she did care for the actual presence of her Beloved upon earth. Before his death, she had begun to understand that the Messiah must needs go away and come again. Well, he has been absent three days, and that in her estimation is long enough. He had gone, and he now comes again. The necessary separation is over. Now she may embrace and cling to him, to be parted from him no more.

Nay, but, O woman! that time is not yet come. It will come. Thy Redeemer liveth, and will stand at the latter day upon the earth,—and in thy flesh thou shalt see God. Then thou shalt hold thy Beloved in thine arms; then thou shalt welcome and embrace him;—then thou shalt be for ever with the Lord.

But touch him not now. Hold him not, as if thou wouldst detain him. This is not that final and permanent return of which he spoke, when he assured his followers that he would come again to receive them to himself. This is but a flying visit—a passing call. He

is on his way to heaven. Suffer him to go. If thou lovest him, rejoice that he goes to his Father.

Yes, however hard it may seem to flesh and blood to be thus tantalized with but a glimpse of him whom thy soul loveth, and whom thine arms would fain grasp in an indissoluble embrace, thou mayst suffer him to depart. For hear the gracious message, which, in reference to his departure, he leaves for his disciples—"But go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (ver. 17). He calls them his brethren. He is not ashamed to call them brethren, to associate with himself the children whom God hath given him. They are God's dear children now, and his brethren beloved. And He to whom now he is ascending is their Father, as well as his Father,—their God, as well as his God.

Ah! well may the Lord's disciples consent, on such a footing as this, to forego for a little longer the joy of his personal presence with them. Earth would indeed be a desert without him, could they think that he had utterly forsaken them. If they had neither his dead body, on which they might lavish the tears and the pledges of a fond but vain remembrance, nor his living eye to smile on them, and his living voice to cheer them,—and if he were gone to an unknown region and a land of strangers, —they might be desolate indeed. But he is gone to his Father's house, where there is room enough for them; and his Father is now their Father,—his God is their God. He must be absent from them for a season; but it is to be with One who is now no stranger to them,—and it is to

be with Him on their behalf. It is to plead their cause, and prepare a place for them; it is to send the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, and to rule over all for their good. He ascends, and even his brethren cannot hope to keep him here; but he ascends to his Father, and their Father,—to his God, and their God.

Let us ponder the sayings of the angels and of our Lord himself.

1. Come see the place where the Lord lay. Come again, if ye have come before. Visit the holy sepulchre;—not in the spirit of carnal superstition,—not in the indulgence of merely natural feelings,—not seeking either to excite or to express your devotion by any merely outward service, however touching and tender as a remembrance of him. No! In that case you will be apt to turn unsatisfied away. You find not the Lord's body. Still come and see where it lay; and think why it lay there once, and why it lies there no more. See here, in the very void and emptiness of the sepulchre, and of every earthly memorial of it,—the proof and pledge of sin atoned for, and death overcome. He who bore your guilt, and lay in that grave in your stead, could not be detained a prisoner there. He is risen, and you in him are now free.

2. He is risen, and he will meet you, as he said. He will manifest himself unto you in another way than he doth unto the world. He will come to you, as you weep over his death. "He goeth before you into Galilee." Yes, believers, your Lord will continue to be known to

you, and your fellowship will be with him. He will find opportunities of communicating with you, not only beside the sepulchre, where in holy retirement you muse and mourn; but in Galilee, amid the ordinary scenes of your daily avocations,—when you return again to your houses and your labour, to your fields and to your nets,—Jesus will be with you. He will be known to you in the breaking of your common bread. He will be known to you in the blessing he bestows on your common toil. He will be known to you as he opens up the Scriptures, which are your daily meditation. He will be known to you as you sit in the secret chamber and walk on the high way. Be sure that Jesus is often near you, when your eyes are holden that you do not recognise him; for do not your hearts burn within you as he talks with you? and may you not often have cause to say with Jacob, "Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not?"

3. Finally, While you prize these precious interviews, and ask to have them multiplied,—while you rejoice to believe that your Lord is always with you, even to the end of the world,—still remember that you embrace him not now as if this were your rest, or as if it were the consummation of your blessed union and communion with him. You may hope to recognise him as often near you upon earth; but remember he ascends to his Father, and your Father; to his God, and your God. There, in his Father's house, seek even now in the Spirit to have your fellowship with him. Let your life be hid with Christ in God. Your treasure is in heaven, let your heart be

there also; and rejoice in all that he is doing for your welfare, and for the salvation of all his people. Above all, wait for his coming again,—his final return to receive you to himself, when all the purposes of his ascension are fulfilled, and all is made ready in his Father's house for you. Then your embrace of him will be for ever; for there is no further separation after that.

XVII.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD STRIVING WITH MAN.

PONTIUS PILATE JUDGING THE LORD CHRIST.

JOHN xviii. 28—xix. 16; LUKE xxiii.; MATTHEW xxvii.

THE character of Pilate, as it is brought out in the scene of our Lord's trial, is an interesting study to those who would trace the workings of natural conscience when it is brought into closer contact than usual with the truth of God, or with Him who is the truth. We see, indeed, little or no evidence of any saving, or even of any deeply serious impression. But we see emotions of natural pity; and we see more,—we see the convictions and relentings, the compunction and hesitation, of a natural sense of duty, and a natural feeling of remorse. He went farther, indeed, in this way than most of the other princes of this world who, in their official capacity, had to deal, not merely with the religion of Jesus (which is the common case now), but with Jesus himself. Herod of Galilee, who had been first the Baptist's patron and then his persecutor, for a long time desired to see Jesus; but when his desire was gratified, and Jesus, sent by Pilate, stood before him on his trial, the crafty "fox" evaded the question, and having carelessly insulted the Saviour, as carelessly dismissed him. Felix, when Paul, arraigned as the prisoner, stood as the preacher before him, and

reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come—trembled; but he sent him away till a more convenient season. Agrippa, partly perhaps in courtly compliment to the unrivalled eloquence of the defence to which he listened, partly in sincere admiration of the inspired pleader, and partly also under a real impression of there being more in his theme than he had before imagined, avowed himself almost persuaded to be a Christian. But the workings of the mind of Pilate were surely deeper, or at least the history gives us a deeper insight into them. There is so much of apparent honesty in the conflict of his soul, between his own evident reluctance to be instrumental in so foul a deed, and the unrelenting importunity of those who cruelly practised on his weakness, that we cannot refuse our compassion, and we almost yield our sympathy. And, on the other hand, in what he saw of the holy and awful majesty of the Lord Jesus, and in the solemn words which he heard from his lips, as once and again, nay repeatedly, he conferred with him face to face, away from the clamours of his Jewish accusers, in his own private hall of audience, there is so close and cogent an application of the divine word, in circumstances the most intensely affecting, to his whole moral nature, that we cannot but regard it as one of the most remarkable cases on record of the Spirit of the Lord striving with man.

What sort of man, either as an individual or as a governor, Pilate was, we have scarcely any means of determining. Other historians, whether Jewish or Gentile, say very little either of his personal character or of his

public administration; and, beyond their narrative of our Lord's trial before him, the sacred writers mention only one particular regarding him. In the Gospel by Luke (xiii. 1), allusion is made to his having perpetrated an act of cruelty on some Galileans, who, it is probable, having come up to Jerusalem to worship at one of the festivals, were slain by his orders in the very midst of the solemnity, so that their blood was mingled with their sacrifices. This severity may have been inflicted on some pretence of tumult or of political disaffection; for the Roman governors were jealous, and not without reason, of the great concourse of strangers from the country districts at such seasons to Jerusalem; and in particular, they had some cause to suspect the natives of Galilee of an inclination to be turbulent and seditious. Perhaps also the misunderstanding which, as we learn from subsequent events, prevailed between himself and Herod, by whom, as king or tetrarch, Galilee was then ruled, might make Pilate willing enough to take an opportunity of wreaking his vengeance on the subjects of his rival when they happened to come within his own government; although it is quite as probable that this very act of violence may have been itself the cause and not the consequence of the quarrel. It is said that on other occasions, both in Judea and in Samaria, Pilate committed great cruelties; and it is certain that he was a man who, in enforcing his authority and prosecuting his ends, held human life very cheap, and made no scruple of recklessly causing blood on a large scale to be shed. Still there is no appearance of his having been wantonly

cruel, either as a man or as a governor; nor even of his having been particularly oppressive or unjust. Most probably, indeed, he was very much like the other governors of the Roman provinces in those days, who, being for the most part noblemen of high rank and family, but of scanty or ruined fortunes, looked to such provincial appointments as means of retrieving or improving their affairs, and expected to enrich themselves by the spoils of the countries which they governed. Hence fines and favours, exactions and extortions of all kinds, formed an ordinary part of their administration, insomuch that it turned very much on the length of time during which a governor held office, at what rate the province should be pillaged. Frequent changes aggravated the evil; for each governor, ruling for a short period, must make the most of it for the purpose of satiating his rapacity; and the only chance of milder treatment lay in the lengthening of the period, so as to spread the demand over a greater number of years. So completely was the system understood, that in the case of this very Pilate and his predecessor in the government, the Emperor Tiberius is said sarcastically to have assigned this very reason for making their tenure of office longer than had previously been the custom. Pilate, therefore, we may well believe, was not better in these respects—in respect of cruelty and rapacity—than the ordinary class of Roman governors of the day. Nor was he worse. The fact of its having fallen to him to judge our Lord, and of his having actually caused him to be crucified, is apt to leave on our minds an impression of this nature. Strongly

condemning his treatment of the Saviour, we form exaggerated notions of the injustice and blood-thirstiness of his character, and conclude that he must have been a very monster so to deal with the Holy One. In this way the lesson which his conduct is fitted to teach is rendered far less pointed and profitable than it might be. It is not unlikely, that in the very trying predicament in which he found himself placed, Pilate acted better, and evinced more sensibility of heart and conscience, than the great majority of his compeers would have done; and moreover, it is not unlikely that in his circumstances some of us would have acted worse.

For, consider the position of Pilate when brought into contact with Jesus. He was a Roman, probably of good family; a soldier and senator of considerable rank, and accustomed to move in the best society. The tone of such society was not favourable to serious thought. It was abundantly frivolous and dissipated. The showy accomplishments and refinements of a luxurious age accorded well with the light spirit of the liberal and sceptical philosophy which was then in vogue. The ancient sternness and simplicity of the republican manners had been relaxed; the ancient depth and devout earnestness of character had given place to a shallow and flippant way of evading all grave consideration and decision of choice, and making light equally of all things. Trained in such a school, in the camp and at the court, a noble Roman might enter life, whether as a man of ambition or as a man of pleasure, with little fixed principle of any kind,—with little habit and little capacity of deep re-

flection,—with a sort of gay and easy indifference of temper, likely enough to waft him buoyant over the waves of fortune, but giving him no hold of the element through which a more solid mind would pursue steadier and more commanding course.

After passing the ordinary novitiate and routine either of fashionable idleness or of military parade (for the times were peaceful), or of perfunctory attendance on the forms of some civil or political calling, such a man might retire, for a season, to the government of a remote province, with whose people, having no connection, he could have no sympathy—and of whose real interests, having little knowledge, he had still less care. There, living in dignified ease, and invested with very absolute and discretionary power,—living, too, never as if he were at home, but always as an exile expecting to be recalled,—he has every inducement to abandon himself to his own pleasure or his own profit, giving himself scarcely any real concern about what may be passing around him. Thus, if not tyrannical, he is very apt to prove like Gallio, governor of Achaia, who, when the whole city of Corinth was excited and convulsed by the agitation of religious controversy, took the matter very easily, and cared for none of these things.

Such, probably, might be Pilate's state of mind when, sitting quietly in his palace, he heard of the strange proceedings of that memorable paschal-week. And as tidings reached him of a singular procession, of one sitting on an ass, and attended by a countless throng, entering the city and the temple, like a moving forest of waving palms,

amid shouts that filled the air; and again, as rumours circulated through his court of a remarkable commotion, first among the Jewish multitude resorting daily in crowds to the temple to see and hear this extraordinary person, and then among the Jewish authorities, all alive and on the alert respecting him; and still further, as the news of this mysterious individual being arrested, and the hasty convening of the Sanhedrim, and the hurried trial and condemnation before that tribunal, and the feverish excitement of the public mind which the affair was creating; —as the news of these things passed around the circle of his attendants, the haughty Roman might listen with an air of real or affected unconcern, as to a mere idle breath of popular folly; and dwelling apart, as in some higher region of imperturbable repose, he might calmly put the subject away from him as beneath or beyond his notice; he might even find materials of courtly and philosophic pleasantry in what was turning the Jewish world upside down.

If so, he must have been somewhat startled when, most unexpectedly, the cause was suddenly transferred to his own judgment-seat, and the whole case brought under his own immediate cognisance. He must now entertain and dispose of a question which otherwise he might have regarded as altogether out of his way. He must meet with this Jewish teacher, who might be supposed to belong to an entirely different sphere from his own, and enter on a discussion which in his ordinary manner of life he would have little dreamed of. It is a somewhat strange position into which this great man is abruptly brought; and it is most interesting to observe how, in

that position, he conducts himself. From the very outset he is embarrassed and uncomfortable, and all throughout the trial he makes successive attempts to evade any decision of the matter.

But before proceeding further, let us adjust the local scenery of this most tragic drama.

When the Jewish leaders brought Jesus to Pilate (John xviii. 28) they would not enter his house. They were at that time eating the passover;—that is, they were keeping the paschal-feast; for the expression is to be understood not merely of the first act of the solemnity —their killing and eating the paschal-lamb, which in the present case was probably over—but of all the subsequent rites and observances during the days of unleavened bread. That they might thus keep the feast acceptably, they must scrupulously, as they believed, abstain during the whole course of it, and especially on the day of preparation for the Sabbath, which this was, from going into a heathen dwelling, and so contracting defilement. In compliance with their scruples, however frivolous and superstitious he might think them, Pilate went out to them to the palace-gate, where, according to eastern custom, was his public seat of audience (chap. xix. 13). There, during the whole of this transaction, he conducted his intercourse with the Jews; but from time to time he took Jesus himself into his own house, or inner hall of judgment, for the purpose of more private trial and examination (chap. xviii. 33; xix. 9). It is necessary to bear this in memory, in attempting to bring before the mind's eye the several incidents of the trial.

I. Meeting the Jews, then, at the door of his palace, Pilate asks what accusation they bring against the man whom they have in custody; and at first he will scarcely attend to the accusers. 'He is a malefactor, you say, else you would not have brought him here (chap. xviii. 30, 31). Be it so. It is some ordinary case of crime, some religious contention, or some breach of the peace, such as are now become too common for me to be troubled with them all. Decide it yourselves. "Take ye him, and judge him according to your law;" I give you full authority and warrant.'

Pilate, however, is not to get so easily off. This is a more serious matter than he thinks. 'It is a capital offence with which this criminal is charged, and "it is not lawful for us to put any man to death"' (ver. 31). His crime is treason against Cæsar, and Cæsar's deputy must look to it: "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that he himself is Christ a king" (Luke xxiii. 2). Pilate, therefore, has no alternative; he must look into the accusation. He takes Jesus, accordingly, into the inner judgment-hall in his palace, thinking probably that a very short inquiry will suffice. And here first the barbed arrow enters his heart, which is to sink deep and remain fast,—the wound rankling and festering till it proves mortal.

If this man takes the title of King of the Jews, as his accusers allege, brief work may be made of his case. And he does acknowledge the title; but then he adds an explanation which opens up an entirely new view of the

affair. He is a king; but his kingdom is not of this world. It does not therefore interfere with Cæsar's (John xviii. 33-36). The Jews who accused him knew, or might have known, this; but they did not choose to make it known to Pilate, for it was necessary for their purpose that Jesus should be charged before Pilate with a political crime. Hence they did not bring him to Pilate's bar as a blasphemer, in which character they themselves, in their own spiritual court, had previously tried and condemned him. They were well aware that Pilate, a Gentile and an unbeliever, would not, as a civil magistrate, have dealt with that offence; at least not in that view of it which their religion might suggest. They accused Jesus, therefore, as a rebel and traitor, as claiming for himself royal rights and honours, and denying them to Cæsar, the Roman emperor, whose authority Pilate must uphold. Nor would it have served their end to say, that he made himself a king in any spiritual or religious sense. They would have Pilate to believe that he sought political power inconsistent with that of Cæsar. Jesus at once, and simply, removes this impression. There is no cause of alarm. He asserts no authority which can at all interfere with that of any lawful earthly government.

But, at the same time, he does assert an authority of a high and sacred character, and in a way which seems to strike his judge (ver. 37). "Thou art a king then?" "I am," is the Lord's reply; "and I am more—I am a witness unto the truth." "What is truth?" says Pilate, —jesting, perhaps, and not waiting for an answer,—

thinking by a jest to turn away the appeal which has already come too closely home to him. Now, he would fain persuade himself, he sees how the case stands. 'This is one of your sages, your contemplative dreamers, not made for this world, as this world is not made for them. He has got hold of some fragments of our wildest and most unearthly philosophy—a visionary king—himself his only kingdom—enamoured of some fond fancy which he chooses to call the truth! It might be curious, in some idle hour, to settle with him what this same truth may be. Meanwhile, he must be acquitted of any grave offence; at the least, he is clearly harmless. "I find in him no fault at all."'

Nay, but, O vain man! this business is not so quickly or so cleverly managed as thou, in thy ingenious wit, art inclined to think. There is more in it than thou art likely soon to reach the end of. Thou hast seen for once another kind of sovereign than any thou hast hitherto met with. Thou hast heard of truth in a way not familiar. He who hath spoken to thee hath spoken as a king,—as one having authority; and, as one having authority, he hath proclaimed to thee that he witnesses to a truth,—to the truth. Yes, to thee, a careless, unfixed self-seeker—to thee, who hast neither reverence nor faith, one has appeared who claims authority, and bears witness to the truth; and thou canst not easily rid thyself of the surmise that it may be authority of which thou shouldst stand in awe,—that it may be truth which thou shouldst believe. Thou art brought into contact with things more serious than, in thy frivolous intercourse

with a world of vain lies, thou hast been accustomed to deal with. Thou must have more to do with this same mysterious stranger, whom thou wouldst so summarily dismiss with a hasty and half contemptuous admission of his harmlessness.

The subsequent conduct of Pilate exhibits a melancholy picture. Whatever air of light-hearted levity he may assume or affect, and however he may try, in his rejoinder to the Lord, to turn the edge of the Spirit's sword,—the quick and powerful word so authoritatively spoken by Him whose word it is,—we see plainly that he is not at his ease. To this extent, at least, he is now evidently in earnest, that he is most anxious to rescue Jesus out of the hands of his accusers. And the very anxiety of the Jews to obtain his blood only increases Pilate's desire to save him. He perceives that there is, that there must be, some high interest at stake, else these formal hypocrites would not be so eager and zealous in the matter. 'They are not in general such warm friends of Cæsar and of Cæsar's power, these rulers of the Jews. They are not commonly so sensitive in regard to treason against the emperor as to persist in an accusation so evidently groundless as this. There must be more at the bottom of this affair than at first sight appears.' Thus from the very beginning of this strange trial, and all throughout, more and more, the pertinacity of the Jews tends to deepen the impression made on Pilate's mind, increases his concern, and makes him the more impatient for an adjustment.

II. When therefore the Jews, instead of acquiescing in

his judgment of acquittal, reiterated the more impetuously their charge against Jesus as seditious, and by way of aggravation, referring to the extent of the mischief, spoke of his labours in Galilee,—"And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place" (Luke xxiii. 5),—Pilate eagerly catches the hint. He will send the case to Herod, within whose jurisdiction Galilee lies, and, fortunately, Herod happens to be at this time in Jerusalem: "When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilean. And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time" (Luke xxiii. 6, 7). If there is any truth in the charge brought against Jesus as a subverter of the government, it is plainly in Galilee, the ordinary place of his ministrations, that the offence must have been chiefly committed, and not in Judea, which he has only occasionally visited. It belongs therefore to Herod, as tetrarch of Galilee, ruling that province under Cæsar, to deal with this rival king;—and the rather because he knows such cases of old, having once been the admirer and follower of just such a prophet,—his friend and patron, entertaining him at his court,—his devoted disciple, hearing him gladly.

Thus Pilate thought that he might evade the necessity of coming to a decision in regard to Jesus and his claims. 'Let Herod be the judge; send the case, by all means, to Herod; he is on all accounts the proper person to dispose of it.'

But this expedient will not stand Pilate in stead. It is to prove a more troublesome business than he could have imagined, and he cannot easily divest himself of the responsibility connected with it. Jesus comes back to him, scourged, indeed, and buffeted, but not judged,—neither absolved nor condemned. Herod mocks him and sets him at nought: "And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate" (Luke xxiii. 11). But not in that way is the question to be set at rest. The cause is still undetermined, and Pilate has to determine it.

What, then, is to be done? The Jews will not be satisfied. They insist on a sentence. It avails not to tell them that neither Pilate nor Herod finds in Jesus any fault worthy of death. Will Pilate then at once discharge him, and so run the risk of being represented to the Roman emperor as shielding a traitor to his power? or will he give him up, notwithstanding his impression of his innocence, to the doom of a convicted malefactor?

But yesterday, and in any other case, it would probably have cost Pilate scarce a moment's thought to decide on this latter alternative, and sacrifice an individual, however guiltless, to his own interests and the interests of his imperial master's authority. And even now, perhaps, he wonders at his own weakness. Whence this unwonted hesitation, these unprecedented scruples, in his mind? This is not the first instance, probably, in which he has been called upon to propitiate supporters, and to secure himself, by giving up an unconvicted man as a

victim to his enemies, and justifying the doubtful step by reasons of state, thus making to himself friends not only of the Mammon, but of the Moloch, of unrighteousness. Why should he be so sensitive now? Can it be that this extraordinary criminal at the bar has virtually changed places with the judge, and marvellously gained an ascendency over him as his king, and cited and sisted him at a higher bar as a witness of the truth to his conscience? Then why does Pilate not avow and follow out his convictions, whithersoever they may lead? Why, at least, does he not do justice to him in whom he finds no fault? Alas! he will attempt another compromise. He sees a way, as he fondly thinks, by which, without committing himself, he may deliver Jesus.

III. Resuming his place at the palace gate, amid much most painful perplexity—perplexity increased by the remarkable warning given him by his wife, who sent to him, saying, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him" (Matt. xxvii. 19); thus divided and distracted between his own and his wife's conscientious feelings and apprehensions on the one hand, and the unrelenting and persevering importunity of the Jews on the other, Pilate bethinks himself of an expedient. He will take advantage of the custom of the feast to release a prisoner, and that prisoner shall be Jesus: "Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people; and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those

things whereof ye accuse him: no, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him." He proposes therefore to "chastise him, and release him." For he adds, "Ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?" (Luke xxiii. 13-17; John xviii. 39.)

Thus Pilate thinks to avoid the necessity of pronouncing judgment, and yet save Jesus. The Jews shall not have it in their power to say that he has acquitted a traitor. It is not to be a judicial sentence at all, but an act of grace and favour,—the deliverance of a prisoner, customary at the season; on which, therefore, no imputation against his loyalty and fidelity in his government can be fairly or even plausibly founded. Thus there may be a sort of compromise between him and the Jews, and, instead of a judgment offending or endangering either party, there may be a measure of neutrality.

Miserable expedient! Most shallow device! Even this discretionary exercise of authority he cannot venture upon without consulting the Jews. They must have a choice, and they can compel him to consent to it. And though he selects one of the worst and most atrocious criminals then in custody, to be offered to them along with Jesus; and though, as Luke tells us, he three successive times most earnestly and pathetically beseeches the people to choose Jesus; he has the deep mortification of hearing their reiterated and impatient cry, "Not this man, but Barabbas," although "Barabbas was a robber" (John xviii. 39, 40).

What is it that has come over the spirit of this Pilate,

usually stern and decided enough in every act of his administration? If his leanings are really toward Jesus, why does he not think, why does he not act for himself! Is he ashamed—is he afraid to speak out? And does he really imagine that he clears himself from the guilt of partaking in this great sin of other men, by the pitiful ceremony of the washing of his hands, and the hollow protest of his lips, "I am innocent,"—he who had but to raise one finger of these hands, or to utter one breath of these lips, and not a single stroke would have fallen upon Jesus, not a hair of his head would have been touched?

Yet it is a characteristic circumstance this washing of his hands. It brings out in marked contrast the weakness of the judge and the violence of the accusers; and it throws light on the brief struggle that follows: "And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matt. xxvii. 23–25).

IV. Weary of resistance, Pilate seems reluctantly to have given over Jesus to be scourged, perhaps with some faint hope that this preliminary severity, which, according to the barbarous custom of that time, preceded the punishment of death, might satiate the cruelty of his persecutors;

and that the people, moved by the spectacle of suffering and shame, might yet relent, and interpose to save him from the cross: "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, and said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands. Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. Then came Jesus forth wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!" (John xix. 1–5.)

The concession only stimulated the fury of his adversaries. So far from being melted to pity by an exhibition which Pilate might think enough to soften the very stones, the Jews were provoked the more by these repeated delays; and the sight of blood, streaming from under the crown of thorns down that holy head, served but to whet their appetite for more. "Behold the man!" says Pilate, pointing to that scourged and bleeding sufferer, whose meek endurance might have disarmed the very wrath of devils! But all the more "the chief priests and officers cried out, Crucify him, crucify him" (John xix. 6).

And now, perceiving clearly the sort of man with whom they had to deal—emboldened by Pilate's evident distress, and presuming on his irresolution, the Jews lay aside all disguise and press at once to their point. They no longer consider it necessary to keep up so much as the form of an accusation of treason. They avow the real cause of

their hostility. Not even professing to submit to Pilate's judgment, they seem to reckon confidently on his accommodating himself to theirs. Seeing that he has not firmness to decide according to his own views, they gather courage, and require him broadly and nakedly to decide according to theirs: "The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God" (John xix. 7).

V. But they had well-nigh overshot the mark. The expression which they let fall renewed all Pilate's scruples, and once more shook his purpose—"He made himself the Son of God." 'Made himself! Can it be that he really is so? It may be, then'—as Pilate from the first could not help surmising—'that this Jesus has authority, and witnesses truth.' He has the authority of God; he witnesses the truth of God; for he is the Son of God. He said so. These Jews now tell Pilate that he said so; and they let out that it was because he said so that they hated and would crucify him. It turns out that their pretence of jealousy about Cæsar's prerogative is but a blind and false colour. Something far more awful is here really involved. Pilate sees this clearly now; and, seeing it, may he not even now stop short and retrace his steps? As it is, he once more pauses and resumes his examination.

O that he had but given fair play to his own convictions!—he might even yet have been saved and blessed. He has another precious opportunity. Once more, away from all Jewish clamours, in the inner hall of judgment,

the judge confers with his prisoner. Jesus "is led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." "When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; and went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer" (John xix. 8, 9). His silence is the silence, not of disrespect, but of awful, divine authority. He has met the charge already brought against him. He has explained what might give rise to the accusation of treason; and, in doing so, he has said enough to determine Pilate's decision, and Pilate is bound to decide. This new question, so earnestly put, is not necessary or relevant; it is not to the point, it is not to the purpose. "Whence art thou?" asks the trembling Roman —'Whence art thou, that thou shouldst make thyself the Son of God?'

Dost thou ask this, O Pilate! as an inquirer? Wilt thou also be his disciple? If so, thou shalt not long be at a loss for an answer. Thou art not far from one even now. It is in thy heart already, if out of thy heart thou wouldst allow thy mouth to speak.

Meanwhile thy function as judge is not yet discharged. There is a case before thee to be disposed of, and there are all the elements for disposing of it. Do justice according to the dictates of thine own conscience, not according to the prejudices and passions of others. Till then Jesus is silent.

Vexed by this silence, and provoked perhaps by the calm demeanour of the Lord, contrasting so painfully

with his own agitation, Pilate suffers one flash of his natural impatience and the insolence of office to escape him, in a scene which has hitherto overawed him. He reminds the prisoner of his power over him,—a power which, though subordinate to that of the emperor, was practically, in such cases and in that distant province, absolute and arbitrary: "Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" (John xix. 10.) It is an unworthy taunt against one in whom he himself acknowledges that he can find no fault. It marks a secret misgiving in regard to the equity of his procedure. Conscious of having no other ground to stand upon, he takes refuge in the last and worst argument of cowardly tyranny,—the argument of mere power.

Alas! this too is but a refuge of lies. There is no escaping from the searching glance of one who seems to pierce his very soul. Infatuated man! this power of which thou makest a boast, however practically irresponsible in so far as thy master on earth, the emperor, is concerned, is not so in reality. It is given thee from above,—it is of God. And wilt thou use it after thine own pleasure, when it is the Son of God, as thou hast reason to fear, who stands before thee? 'The sin of those who delivered me to thee is aggravated tenfold by their seeking thus to turn against the cause of God and his Son the very power that is ordained of God. Thy sin will not be the less if thou art moved to yield to their importunity. "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he

that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin"' (John xix. 11).*

But yield, after all, he did; although to the last—all the more after this closing interview—he would fain have delivered his prisoner. "From henceforth," more than ever, "Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, If thou let him go, thou art not Cæsar's friend" (John xix. 12). The struggle becomes more desperate as it draws near its close. The claim of Jesus—his claim of sovereignty as a king, of truth as a witness, and now even of divinity as the Son of God—is pressing closer and closer on the conscience. But, alas! alas! the loud cry prevails, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend."

Ah! it had been well for Pilate if, at this eleventh hour, in this final crisis of his mental struggle, the Lord's appeal to his tremendous responsibility, as having no power but from above, had been effectual to make him feel that he had no discretion,—that he was shut up to the necessity of deciding for Jesus, and owning him as the King, the true Witness, the Son of God. It had been still better if, at the very first, when the idea of sovereignty and of truth, as not fictions but realities, took hold of his mind, he had learned to stand in awe, that he might not sin,—to believe, that he might be saved. If there be ground for the vague rumours of history, he had but little ease or peace in his future life, which he himself, it is said, in disgrace and in exile, terminated by a

* See Appendix.

voluntary death. It is a solemn reflection to think how near the vacillating judge, the despairing suicide, may once have been to a believer. It is a most emphatic warning to all, to trifle with no convictions of their own, to yield to no solicitations of others, to let the word of God have free course in their hearts, and to offer no resistance to the strivings of his good Spirit.

XVIII.

THE WICKED TAKEN IN THEIR OWN NET.

PONTIUS PILATE DEALING WITH THE JEWS.

JOHN xix. 13–37.

THE fatal tragedy in which Pilate bears so sad a part, has what we might almost call an after-piece, in his subsequent intercourse with those to whom at last he has made up his mind to give way. Altogether, it is, if I may say so, a strange game throughout that we see carried on between Pilate and the Jews,—between the half-awakened conscientiousness of the governor and the unscrupulous ferocity of the Pharisees. They are well matched in this trial of strength or skill. They are nearly balanced, mutually seeking to overbear or to overreach one another; and were it not that the subject of contention is so solemn, and the issue so serious, a discerning by-stander might almost smile as he looks on. At first the Pharisees have greatly the best of it. Their remorseless and unrelenting bigotry gives them an advantage over the vacillating Roman, who, however irreligious, has still some sense of honour and some feelings of compassion. Accordingly they press hard upon him. They drive him from one point of defence to another. They carry in succession the several outposts at which he would gladly rally and make a

stand. They beat up his refuges and lurking-places, where he vainly tries to evade them, till at last they shut him up in a corner, and he is fain to capitulate, or rather surrender at discretion. But now it is his turn to make reprisals upon them. He has his revenge; he has the satisfaction of a certain kind of retaliation. And if they insolently exult in having made a tool of him, he may at least enjoy, if he can, the triumph of seeing them also sufficiently degraded; for at a certain stage the parts are reversed. These Jews, however hardened and hackneyed in their trade of hypocrisy, have yet, as well as Pilate, their tender point, at which they may be made to feel sore. They, too, have their scruples—not quite so honest or generous as those of Pilate, but as sensitive when touched or trenched upon; and Pilate, their new ally and confederate, having as little sympathy with their scruples as they had with his, has now the upper hand, and may, if he pleases, gratify himself by tantalizing and tormenting them.

It may not be unprofitable to mark an instance or two of this strange and sad cross-fire—illustrating the vulgar proverb of the biter bit; or, to use the more becoming scriptural phrase, "the wicked taken in their own snare, and falling into the pit they have themselves digged."

I. There is much meaning in the last appeal which Pilate addresses to the Jews, evidently after he has made up his own mind, and apparently for the purpose of drawing them on to commit themselves more deeply than they might intend or wish: "And it was the pre-

paration of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your king! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your king? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Cæsar" (John xix. 14, 15).

It is the day before the Sabbath, and it is getting far on towards noon. Much time has already been lost through Pilate's long hesitation; and even now, when the hours are slipping by, he seems to be still trifling with them. Else why this new solemnity of bringing Jesus out, and presenting him to them as their king? and why this idle repetition of the appeal to them, "Shall I crucify your king?" Why waste words and put off the business of the day? As it is, the day is already too far spent. The Sabbath will be upon them before the work is done, and Jesus may escape somehow after all.

For though they have no scruples about ridding themselves of a preacher of righteousness, and of the righteousness which he preaches—nay, though they think that in this way they are doing God service—by no means will they, for all the world, have the thing done on the Sabbath. They had thought that they were safe from any such risk. They set about their task betimes in the morning. They summoned their own council at the high priest's house while it was yet dark; and they came early enough thereafter to the governor's palace. And if it had not been for the most unexpected obstacle which they met with there, the

whole affair might have been already over, and they might now be decently and devoutly composing their minds for the coming day of rest. For certainly they never dreamed of any conscientious difficulty in the quarter to which they applied. They never imagined that a Roman judge could have any feeling in such a matter, or that it would cost him a second thought to dispose of it, or let them dispose of it, as they chose. Much to their surprise and annoyance, they have been kept waiting all the forenoon, while Pilate has been conferring with Jesus, consulting Herod, and debating with himself. And now, when after much ado they have prevailed with him and got his sanction, it is barely possible to avoid encroaching on the Sabbath. And even yet Pilate seems to be manœuvring and managing to gain time, coming slowly to the point, keeping Jesus still in his hands, repeating his idle and tedious appeals, renewing his formal and solemn protests, and shrinking from the last decisive step.

In this irritating suspense they lose patience, they lose temper. Their usual cautious cunning deserts them. They let out more and more of their bitter hatred to Jesus: "Away with him, away with him, crucify him." Nor is this all. They are provoked to go farther in their avowal and asseveration of compliance with the Roman government than in a less hasty moment they would have ventured to do: "We have no king but Cæsar;"—'We not only give up this pretender to the throne, but we renounce all claim at any time to independence. Not only is this man not our king, but

never in any sense are we to have any king but Cæsar. Not even our Messiah when he does come, as this Jesus professes to be our Messiah already come,—not even the true Messiah is to be our king.'

Were these Jews seriously and soberly prepared to make this broad avowal in a calmer hour? Were they ready thus absolutely, unequivocally, and without restriction or reservation, to pledge themselves to Rome,—to deny not only this Jesus as their Messiah, but the very hope of a Messiah altogether,—to give a foreign tyranny so unlimited a hold over them, and abandon all their fondly cherished hopes of national glory, liberty, and power?

No; but they had a purpose to serve. They were on the point of being baulked in a favourite scheme on which their heart was set. They were approaching the very verge of what they most punctiliously accounted sacred. They must, at all events, have Jesus crucified; and they must have him crucified in such time as not to interfere with the Sabbath.

Ah, Pilate! thou art already well-nigh even with these Pharisees who have so hardly pressed thee. It may gratify thy most vindictive feelings,—it might gratify the malice of the very fiend himself,—to get this insight into the hearts of these men;—to see them, as the trembling eagerness of their unholy passion contends with the miserable bondage of their superstitious formality, so simply betraying themselves, so rashly committing themselves to an extent far beyond all that in the first outset of this affair they could themselves have dreamed of. It

is a triumph for hell itself, to see "the wicked snared in their own devices, and falling into the pit themselves have digged."

II. And their own vain and impotent remonstrance—when the blunder of their extravagant concession strikes them by way of after-thought, and Pilate keeps them rigidly to the letter of their admission—serves to bring out still more palpably the sort of by-play between the parties in this crime of crucifying the Lord: "And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written" (John xix. 19-22).

And he answered shrewdly. For by this time the rulers of the Jews seem to have recovered their recollection, and they find that their Roman friend, their new ally in this confederacy against Jesus, has somewhat outwitted them. He has taken them at their word, and has them pledged much deeper than they, on a moment's more deliberate reflection, can well consent to be pledged. They would fain retrace their steps. They would retract or qualify what they have said; and at least contrive to have the case put not quite so strongly against them. Hence they propose a change in the inscription.

The title, as Pilate wrote it, intimated that, even if Jesus were the rightful and hereditary king of the Jews, he might justly be condemned, because, by their own acknowledgment, they could now have no king of their own—no king but Cæsar. They would have it modified so as to involve an admission that there might be a king of the Jews, and to declare merely that this Jesus was not that king. The crime of Jesus, as Pilate expressed it, was, that even if he were by right the king of the Jews, —even allowing the soundness and legitimacy of his claim,—he should have asserted that claim at all. His crime, as the Jews would now have it explained, was merely that his claim was false. They would now have him crucified as pretending to be their king. Pilate crucified him as actually being their king: thereby declaring, not only that one wrongfully usurping the title, but that even one having an undoubted personal right to it, if he ventured to avow and exercise it, might, on the ground of the allegiance which the Jews owed to the Roman emperor, be justly put to death.

And this the Jews themselves had virtually allowed: "We have no king but Cæsar." It was too late, therefore, for them now to attempt to draw back; Pilate had them committed. '"He said, I am king of the Jews"... so now you would have the accusation run. He said! nay, it was yourselves who said it. You expressly admitted that, even if he were your king, you disowned him. For you gave him over to me, not on the ground of his claiming falsely to be your king, but on the broad general ground of your having no king but Cæsar. By

that admission you must be held bound, even though now you may seek to escape from some of its consequences that you did not formerly advert to. You told me I might crucify your king, because you had no king but Cæsar. You appealed to my fidelity as a deputy to Cæsar: "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend." And you will find me faithful—at least to the full extent of your own most loyal and most dutiful acknowledgment.'

Has not Pilate the better of them here? And do not they, with their after-thoughts, make as poor and miserable a figure as Pilate with his scruples beforehand? They first sought to entrap him, and carry him along with them in a course in which they needed his concurrence; and now they find that, in their eager haste to accomplish this, they have themselves gone much farther than they meant to go in the way of denying and disavowing their own promised and expected Messiah.

Thus the wicked and the worldly become entangled in their own schemes, and put it in the power often of the weakest of their accomplices to unmask them. Thus you may be apt to pledge yourselves unwarily to the world. Having still some religious profession, such as it is, you would not engage in what is altogether inconsistent with it. In your practical opposition to serious godliness, and in your approaches and applications to the ungodly, you would save, as far as possible, that measure of faith, or of formality, which even yet you hold to be essential,—just as these Jews, in their persecution of Jesus and their flattery of Cæsar, would fain reserve their hope of such a Messiah and such a king as might suit their views. So

you would persuade yourselves, and, it may be, others too, whom you wish to go along with you, that it is not religion itself that you are sacrificing in the course which you follow, but only some extravagant and unreasonable mode of it. But, unluckily, in courting others you may be apt to betray and to commit yourselves. And a shrewd man of the world may soon clearly enough perceive, that however you may pretend or profess to be merely giving up this or that form or fashion of religion, you are really quite willing to give up religion altogether; that, in fact, you are prepared to do so,—to go the full length of preferring the world to God; and that, not merely in reference to the claims which this or that particular power or principle might have over you, but in reference to the claims of any other power or principle whatsoever, besides himself, the prince of this world has really nothing to fear. You may be desirous, on reflection, of keeping yourselves free, to render a certain kind of homage to some ideal lord, when he shall come to demand it. But meanwhile, and practically, to all intents and purposes you are the subjects of Cæsar alone; and the servant of Cæsar is shrewd enough to perceive it.

And will the world be slow to take advantage of what is thus let out, and to interpret in the largest sense your giving up of your own King, and your avowal of allegiance to its prince? You may attempt to explain, and limit, and modify; you may wish to make it appear that, after all, in the particular instance in question, it is not real godliness that you are compromising or conceding, but only what may sometimes, though too strictly, be called

godliness, or what unwarrantably professes to be godliness,—not the King of the Jews, but one who said he was the King of the Jews. But, alas! the spirit which you evince is the spirit of unreserved submission to the world and its prince. You too clearly show, by what you give up now, that, if required, you would give up all,—that not only one saying that he is your king, but your king himself, if need be, would be sacrificed.

Nay, is it not in fact your King that you are sacrificing? Is it not godliness itself that you are compromising? Then of what worth or avail is the vain qualification which you would now attach to your concession? Why make any reservation in favour of any religion, when all religion, or at least all its real and living spirit, is substantially gone?

The Jews would have it written that he whom they crucified said he was their king; as if, had he been really their king, they would not so have treated him! But this shift could stand them in no stead. It was their King, after all, whom they crucified; and therefore Pilate did them no wrong when he answered, "What I have written I have written."

III. There is still one other feature worthy of illustration in this record of the poor and pitiful position in which these Jewish persecutors of the Lord found themselves. It is their final application to Pilate, as their victim hung upon the cross: "The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath-day, (for that Sabbath-day was an

high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away" (John xix. 31).

Mark here the wretched superstition of these hypocrites, at the mercy as they are now of the very man, all whose better scruples they themselves have assailed and overcome!

As evening draws on apace, and the Sabbath is about to begin, the Jews are again troubled by the thought of that holy day being desecrated; more especially as this Sabbath-day is a high day, a great festival, distinguished as the principal Sabbath of the paschal feast. It must be observed, therefore, with peculiar solemnity; its rest must be undisturbed, and its sanctity unviolated. But here are three crosses at the city gate,—a most unseemly profanation of the holy season. Here is a work of death going on, by which its repose is broken; for the punishment of the cross is lingering, and many hours may elapse before the sufferers are relieved from their horrid agony. What, then, is to be done? Some speedier mode of despatching them must be resorted to,—in mercy, perhaps? to shorten the period of their excruciating pains? Nay, for that matter, they might have been left to hang as long as nature could sustain them. But the Sabbath must be kept holy! And who, it might be asked, who exposed it to the risk of desecration?—who but these very Jews themselves, in their haste to shed innocent blood? 'It is a dismal work. Let it be all got over, and let every trace of it be effaced, before the peaceful Sabbath eve sets in.' Ah! are your hearts misgiving you? Are your consciences smiting you? Do

you secretly feel that fraud and murder are but sorry preparations for religious duty? Nay, no such suspicion disturbs your self-complacency—but the Sabbath—the Sabbath!

Blessed day! that such enormous and unblushing criminality should shelter itself under colour of respect and reverence for thee!—that men, dead to every holy feeling, every kind affection, should pretend to know thy value, and to love and honour thee!

These Pharisees, were they men of like passions with their fellows, that, in the midst of a crisis so awful, they were wholly occupied with such punctilios? The heavens were darkened, the earth convulsed, the rocks riven, the vail of the temple rent in twain. He who hung upon the cross, meanwhile, patiently enduring anguish, insult, and outrage, was uttering mysterious words of sovereign and gracious consolation to his fellow-sufferer,—of most pathetic complaint to his God! Yet none of these things moved the Pharisees. Their only care was to get the whole business over, and all the apparatus of torture and the dead bodies taken away, no matter where, before the hour of the opening Sabbath should come. And when it did come, they would compose themselves for a due observance of all their Sabbath ritual with serene, self-satisfied solemnity,—as if nothing extraordinary had marked that preparation-day,—as if they had not gazed on the agony of One with whose mysterious sufferings heaven and earth sympathized, and had not themselves uttered the fearful imprecation, "His blood be on us, and on our children!"

Now, surely when these men thus anew applied to

Pilate for such a purpose as this, they must have appeared to him in an aspect abundantly humiliating. Here again, they who pressed him so importunately are at his mercy, —they who overbore with their clamour all his conscientious scruples, are now fain to come to him with certain scruples of their own. In the morning of this very day they seemed to be troubled with no tender feelings, to be above all the weaknesses of ordinary human nature,—to have no fear—no reverence—no remorse. They were bold and reckless. They would shrink from nothing themselves. They had no allowance for any sensitiveness in others. They seemed to acknowledge no restraint of justice or of pity. Before the gratification of their passions, and the attainment of their ends of policy, they would make all things give way. And now these very men are in utter consternation at the very idea of even a hairbreadth deviation from the letter of a positive institution. The deed itself did not hurt their conscience; but that it should all be over in good time for their Sabbath devotions, this was a point of infinite moment to their peace!

Pilate, however, is more indulgent to them than they had been to him. They had shown little regard for his compunctions. They would not wait his time. They hurried him on without reflection, and made him consent to an act of wrong from which his soul all the while recoiled. Fairly might he now have retorted upon them. Why should he accelerate or interfere with the ordinary course of justice for their accommodation? What has he to do with their Sabbath, or with

the possibility of this execution encroaching on its sanctity? That is their concern alone. It was they who clamoured for it, and insisted on it all the morning; and if it came too near the Sabbath, it was their own doing, and what was it to him? But the easy Roman is more good-natured than they might have expected to find him. He is willing to relieve them out of the difficulty in which they are involved. He has no wish to offend their religious feelings,—by all means let the horrid work of death be shortened. Let the criminals be despatched at once. Their sufferings will be the less, and the consciences of these honest and religious Jews will be saved!

Thus with something like contempt Pilate must have heard and granted this request. He could scarcely give them credit for real sincerity in their religion. After all that he had seen of them, he could have no great opinion of their piety,—however he might smile at their superstition, or hate their hypocrisy. What, indeed, could be the impression made upon this worldly prince by such ostentatious affectation of a regard for holy ordinances on the part of those who had so lately denied the Holy One and the Just, and demanded a murderer to be given to them? What could be the effect, but altogether to disparage in his eyes these holy ordinances themselves, and confirm him in the notion that all punctual observance of sacred duties,—all scrupulous adherence to sacred laws,—all godliness itself, in short, with its holy exercises and duties, was but a fond dream, or a vain pretence?

Alas! how apt are the men of this world to turn to such account as this the inconsistencies of those who profess to be religious! How much encouragement do they derive in their own neglect of sacred things, from the apparent falsehood or infirmity of those who more devoutly regard them! How easy is it for a man, witnessing in those who themselves too plainly neglect, and who have no scruple in leading others to neglect, the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith, —witnessing in such characters not a little punctiliousness in the regular discharge of certain pious offices,— how easy is it for such a man, and how natural, to rush at once to a conclusion, and indiscriminately to condemn, or to despise, alike the offices themselves and those who so discharge them!

So it might have been with Pilate; and not without some considerable show of reason, or some plausible excuse, at least, if he had had these Jews alone to deal with. He might have justified himself, by their vile hypocrisy, in now at last dismissing for ever those serious thoughts which had, in all this dark business, been harassing and distracting him. He might have got rid of his uneasy misgivings, and settled down again into the peace and quietness of scornful or sceptical indifference.

So it might have been, but that God in his wise providence—having, it would seem, determined not to leave himself in this man's soul without a witness, and not to leave him with any apology for his sin—brought

him, on this very same night, into contact with one that feared God after quite another fashion from these Jews.

For so it was ordered, that scarcely had these Pharisees left his presence,—these hypocrites, whose baseness might well occasion, and almost warrant, some emotions of indignation and disgust against all that they contaminated with their touch,—scarcely had they left his presence, when a man of another stamp came in upon another errand. Joseph of Arimathea is introduced;—a devout man, likely to place devotion in a better and truer light before this prince: "And after this Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus" (John xix. 38). This Joseph, too, as well as the chief priests, scrupulously and punctiliously respects the Sabbath. He too is in haste to have his work concluded ere the Sabbath sets in. But what is the work on which he is intent? Not such a work as they had on hand, but a work of faith and labour of love. They came to dishonour Jesus, by adding yet new outrages to all that they had already inflicted; he to honour him, by reverently consigning him to the tomb. They wanted him taken away and put aside ere the Sabbath should commence; but where, or how, they cared not. With what indignities he might be treated,—how his bones might be scattered and left to bleach among the skulls from which the place got its name,—what was all that to them, so as only they got through their customary

Sabbath routine? Joseph, too, wishes the body of Jesus taken away before the Sabbath; but with what different treatment!—with fragrant spices, and comely burial service, and the laying of it in a sepulchre wherein was never man yet laid (John xix. 38-42).

Thus, to counteract in Pilate's mind the impression which hard-hearted hypocrisy had made, there is presented to his view an instance of truest and tenderest devotion. Pilate had been struck with reverence and awe as he gazed on the Lord's unspeakable majesty, and heard his words of gracious authority and truth; he had begun to think that this might be a divine person, and the thought had troubled him during the whole pleading by which he was at last persuaded or constrained to give him up. When he saw, however, this holy and heavenly being left alone in his dying hour, deserted, and apparently scorned, by all; when he saw, especially, that he was to be recklessly cast aside as a worthless thing by men who made a great profession of strictness in religion; when, in their usage of this Just One, he perceived the offensive and most repulsive union of bitter malice and base cruelty with the most imposing sanctity of mien and manners;—what more natural than that he should relapse into a state of hardened, indifferent unconcern?—as if all the things which had ever moved him to serious thought were to be regarded as little better than solemn mockery or imposition. But he is not thus to be given over. He is not to have such a plea or pretence for his unbelief as the conduct of these Jews might seem to furnish. He is

to have a specimen of true piety as well as of its counterfeit. He is to know that there can be such a thing as an honestly religious man, a punctual observer of the Sabbath, and, at the same time, upright, merciful, compassionate,—one who can testify his love to Jesus when all else forsake him,—one giving such simple and affectionate proof of his real attachment as may well touch Pilate's heart again, and go far to awaken once more his sentiments of reverence and awe.

Great, in this view, is the value of a single Joseph of Arimathea amid a crowd of frivolous or formal Pharisees. Great the good that he may do, most precious the testimony which he may bear, and the example which he may show, by counteracting the unfavourable impressions which less consistent or less straightforward professors of religion leave on careless, and even on thoughtful minds; by reviving feelings of admiration or of love for the gospel, which the conduct of some of its disciples may have stifled or blunted; by appealing to the sympathies of men who, though not thoroughly religious themselves, can yet appreciate religious excellences and graces in others; by removing prejudices, and presenting the beauty of holiness in its own fair and honourable aspect, apart from the colourings which less hearty and ingenuous characters may manage to throw over it. Such a one may do much to keep alive salutary convictions, obviate misapprehensions, and conciliate favour; and if his testimony issues not in the conversion of those before whom it is exhibited, it serves at least to rescue the blessed gospel of Christ from those unworthy imputations under

which the ungodly would fain seek to shelter their rejection of it. Pilate may still harden his heart and resist the striving of the Spirit of God with his conscience; but the fact is not without meaning—and it has a solemn bearing on his state of mind and ultimate responsibility—that, amid all that he saw of human wickedness and weakness in the close contact into which he was brought with those who called themselves the people of God, the first image certain to rise up in Pilate's memory, whenever he retraced these scenes, must have been the venerable look and language of authority with which the Lord himself appealed to him; and his last recollection must have been that of Joseph of Arimathea coming in to beseech him that he might take away the body of Jesus for an honourable burial.

XIX.

THE CASE OF PILATE—A WARNING AGAINST RESISTING THE SPIRIT.

We are unwilling to leave the subject of Pilate's character and conduct, without attempting to apply it more particularly and practically than we have yet done to ourselves. For there are many Pilates still among us; and many occasions on which the Lord Jesus, if not personally, yet as represented in his cause, his gospel, and his people, comes before them for trial and judgment. And it may be interesting and profitable to observe how far, in such circumstances, our modern Pilates follow the winding track of their sorely harassed and desperately hunted predecessor of old.

Let us trace, then, a parallel case. Instead of Pilate, let us place on the bench an individual of the present day; and let each reader conceive that "he is the man."

Jesus comes before you to be tried; and his adversaries, the world, the devil, and the flesh, press for a sentence of condemnation. In plain language, the claims of serious religion, or vital godliness, are pressed upon you in a form and with an urgency which you find it difficult to evade. You are called upon, in a manner more peremptory than usual, to decide between God and Mammon. You are shut up to the necessity of choosing whom you will serve.

This crisis may arise in a variety of ways,—either in reference to the general question of your condition and character before God, or in reference to some particular point of practical detail which brings that question specially to an issue.

You are living, and you have been living perhaps all your days, in a state of quiet and secure indifference;—satisfied with a respectable routine of religious forms and moral decencies, and giving yourselves little concern about any deeper movement of soul, such as some might consider necessary to your being enrolled among the true followers of the Lamb. You hear, indeed, of proceedings in certain quarters, and among a certain class, which seem to indicate a very different tone of religious feeling from anything with which you are familiar. You hear and read of convictions and awakenings, of changes and conversions, of intense excitement, of extraordinary emotions both of joy and sorrow, of earnest meditation, of burning zeal,—of things, in short, which show that the question which you take so easily and settle so smoothly, is found by others to be more engrossing, more agitating, more spirit-stirring. You regard these things, however, as a mere idler might listen to the strange news of revolutions in other lands, scarcely knowing what to make of them,—scarcely caring to know; or as Pilate might superciliously catch some floating rumour bandied in his vacant court-circle, respecting Him who was creating such a stir in Jerusalem.

But something occurs to bring the matter home to you. Suddenly you find Jesus—the gospel or the cause of

Jesus—standing before you. And who, or what, has brought him? Perhaps your own conscience, half awakened,—or your worldly inclinations,—your worldly lusts. These have taken the alarm. Jesus—the gospel or the cause of Jesus—is interfering with your allegiance to the master whom they serve,—the world, or the prince of the world. This religion is like to be troublesome. It is advancing very high and paramount claims,—claims, as these advisers would fain represent them to you, incompatible even with the just and lawful demands of this world's necessary business. On this plea and charge, these accusers—these worldly lusts of yours—or, it may be, worldly companions flattering your lusts—virtually bring the religion of Jesus to your bar, and press you summarily to dispose of it.

Like Pilate, perhaps, you would gladly enough avoid the necessity of taking up the case at all. You shrink from the question, and are shy of meddling with it,—you would rather keep this whole matter at a distance. You have a sort of uncomfortable feeling that it does not lie quite in your way; that the discussion of it might not be altogether to your taste; and that, if you once entertained it, you might not easily get rid of it. But then, on the other hand, there is great importunity, not to be beaten off, in the demand made on you for a decision.

At this stage, it may be an importunity all on one side. There may be no very urgent pleading, no very close striving, as yet, in favour of religion. The Lord may as yet be silent. But his enemies—your sins, and the

world's vanities—are clamorous; for they have taken the alarm. They see that if the high authority which religion claims is to be acknowledged, or even tolerated, it strikes at the root of their power; and this or the other darling attachment must be sacrificed,—this or the other favourite indulgence must go. Therefore they press for your decision against that authority. It is true, they may not venture to avow their real motive and design, any more than the Jewish rulers ventured to do before Pilate. They did not tell Pilate that they wished to get rid of Jesus because he was destroying their influence and exposing their arts: that would have been too plain speaking. They went about the matter more warily,—more wilily. And on the same principle, it might be too plain speaking in those lusts and pleasures which regard Jesus as their enemy, to let you understand at once what they would have, or to avow that they hate him because he condemns them. It is not thus that you are to be managed, and, if possible, "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." No; these plausible Jewish hypocrites sink the offence against themselves, and are only anxious lest Cæsar's lawful power be touched. And so the plea still is, that Jesus and his cross—or rather, that Jesus and his crown—would threaten even what is lawful in this world,—its lawful and necessary pursuits, or its lawful and necessary pleasures. Yes; the fear is, that these high and uncompromising views of Christ's authority, as so paramount and so holy, are carrying matters decidedly too far, and encroaching upon every other province, and engrossing and swallowing up all things. It is plain that,

if this kind of religion is to prevail, the world is at a stand.

Such is the charge which certain secret sins in the heart, or certain open flatterers in the world, towards whom you have a lurking bias, and who have gained an ascendency over you—certain solicitors with whom you are inclined to comply—certain habits which, almost for very necessity, you are fain to indulge—may be urging against that godliness which, as they are beginning to suspect, would reprove and denounce them. And they may be insisting on the plea importunately, in the hope that you may be at once persuaded to acquiesce in the accusation and give sentence accordingly.

I. Well, and what is the first step in the process? You have no great objection to do what is asked. You would willingly enough dispose of the whole matter by coming to the abrupt conclusion that this allegation against all serious religion—at least against a religion so very serious as that in question—is substantially well founded; that it will not do for this world; that it does involve danger to the quiet and orderly course of this world; and that it must, therefore, be sacrificed. Thus you would decide,—your sympathies and predilections, as yet, being all against such a religion. Your interest as well as your inclination leads you to leave unmolested those principles and passions opposed to religion, which, if you do not positively desire to gratify, you are, at any rate, not prepared to mortify and offend.

But you cannot altogether evade the necessity of at

least appearing to deliberate. You cannot quite drown your instinctive sense of what is due to the claims which are pressed upon you. There is a time for reflection. You have to enter into your closet, and Jesus follows you there. And, however unseasonable and inconvenient the interruption of your business or your gaiety may be, you are constrained in your own mind to look a little into this religion of Jesus, and let its voice, however faintly, enter the ear of conscience.

And here the hollowness of the pretence on which the first insidious charge against it is urged, must soon become apparent. You quickly perceive that the plea of interference with anything really useful or lawful in the world cannot be sustained. A single word of explanation on the part of our Lord satisfied Pilate that his imperial master had nothing to fear. And you too, in the like case, however willing to be imposed upon, cannot fail to see through "the deceitfulness of sin." You are not at all disinclined, at the instigation of sin, or of some of its vain and worldly allies and friends, to get rid at once of this religion, whose very presence is troublesome, by finding that it must necessarily in practice be compromised, for the sake of this world's peace and this world's indispensable calls. But you cannot easily satisfy yourself that you are quite justified in doing so. Conscience, the judge, detects the partial counsel of the accusers. Almost in spite of yourself you are convinced that the character of this religion, so pure, so spiritual, and so holy, is such as not only must prevent any undue interference with a single lawful claim which anything in this world can

have over you,—but must even, on the contrary, impart a new sanction and a new sacredness to them all. Nay more, you cannot but suspect that it is this very character that makes the world's sins and vanities so clamorous against it.

And then, its twofold claim of sovereignty and of truth begins to arrest you. Jesus is King; and he is the Witness of the Truth. It is with authority that he speaks, and there is an impression made by his emphatic and peremptory demand upon your faith, such as is not easily shaken off. You cannot but feel that there must be, that there is, more in this religion than you at first imagined. You cannot dispose of its claims so summarily as might suit your convenience, and that of your worldly lusts. No! You have an idea now that it may be mystical, visionary, fanatical; but whatever it may be, it has got a hold over you. It has taken possession of you; so that, at all events, it cannot be put down by any false pretence in regard to its interference with other claims. Such a pretence might once have led you to think some sacrifice of religion's high demands excusable, at least, if not absolutely indispensable; but it will not avail you now.

II. What, then, is next to be done? Send the question to your neighbour, and take his opinion. It concerns him as much as you,—perhaps a little more. It is in Herod's jurisdiction; let Herod judge. Yes! Try, if you can, to devolve upon another the responsibility of determining this matter. See if some worldly friend, or, still better, if some worldly enemy, will keep you in countenance, and

take away from you the blame. And if possible let him be one who has been better acquainted with these things than you,—who has at one time entertained godliness at his court, or in his house, and has been accustomed to hear it gladly. If such a one now mocks it, and sets it at nought,—if he scoffs at this religion, or at its professors,—his levity may somewhat relieve and dissipate your growing seriousness.

And this seasonable relief administered by him to you may make you great friends!

Ah! how many intimacies are thus cemented between individuals, otherwise most uncongenial to one another. Herod and Pilate had little in their respective characters, and little in their previous histories, to bring them together. Herod was probably too impetuous and headstrong, Pilate too reserved and too refined, to admit of much cordiality between the fastidious Roman courtier and the rude Galilean tyrant. They had mutually offended one another; they were at outstanding enmity and open quarrel. But a common cause, or rather a common distress, made brothers of them. They were both rendered uneasy by having to deal with Jesus,—Herod by his old recollections, Pilate by his new convictions. Hence the reconciliation between Pilate and one whom otherwise he would have hated or despised; Herod seemed to give him countenance and support in his attempt to get rid of this troublesome case.

And is not this the explanation of too many of this world's friendships, as well as of much of that complacency and admiration with which we see some highly

gifted individuals regard those who in every valuable endowment are far inferior to themselves,—for whom, indeed, and for whose sentiments and manners, except on this most deplorable ground of union, they could have no toleration? Is it not thus that we must account for a certain delight which even persons of some good taste and good feeling take in the coarse scandal or the profane levity of loose companions, who, in a style of writing or conversation that would otherwise be most offensive, use familiar liberties with sacred subjects and serious men, to the implied disparagement of all sacredness and seriousness together? Is it not that, ill at ease, and not satisfied in their own minds, they derive a certain courage and confidence from seeing how others, better acquainted perhaps with these matters than they can pretend to be, are yet free to treat with every kind of contempt what has made them tremble and stand in awe? If Herod, who knows such cases so much more intimately, as being himself, after a sort, a Jew,—once professing a kind of devotion, the friend of a holy man, understood to have repented of the wrong he did in beheading him,—if Herod and his men of war set Jesus at nought,—it may the less hurt the conscience of a Gentile unbeliever to treat his cause with indifference, and count his death a trifle.

Still, where there is conviction of any depth at all, the conscience may not be so easily satisfied. Herod, after all, though he has insulted Jesus, has not judged him. The case is still undisposed of, and in all its urgency it comes back upon Pilate once more.

Ah! you would often be glad to find a temporary ex-

pedient for keeping serious thought away; by lending an ear to the vain and flippant cavils of those who, dealing in smart remarks, or in the light and frivolous irreverence of tale-bearers and busy-bodies, substitute mere wit for argument, and settle the most momentous questions by a personal hit or a party jest. But criticising or mocking the godly does not really get rid of the claims of godliness. Neither you nor your friends have yet decided the cause. Jesus is still there,—claiming sovereignty and witnessing truth. His adversaries—the lusts and passions which he condemns—still require you to give him up. And, in spite of raillery and ridicule—in spite of all that might make you easy and indifferent about the matter—you have your own misgivings and relentings. You cannot bring yourself altogether to renounce or sacrifice your reverence for religion, or make an entire surrender of your religious feelings and scruples, to the sins, the follies, and vanities of the world. These, therefore, or your own lusts flattered and stirred up by them, are still unsatisfied. They persevere in their demand that you should come to some decision in regard to this serious call of godliness,—such a decision as may prevent its troubling them any more. What, then, is to be done?

III. Try what a compromise will do. You will not decide positively in favour of this religion; but neither will you decide peremptorily against it. You will leave the matter undetermined; you will simply let Jesus alone. He shall escape the last sentence of death; but it shall be merely by sufferance, and of grace. You will take

advantage of some fair and plausible excuse for not actually proceeding to extremities against his cause, or against his people; such an excuse as cannot well subject you to the suspicion of fully sanctioning either it or them. The decent custom of the season, ordinary civility, mere routine, may explain what you say or do in favour of godliness, or of its statutory observances; and you will not be committed on either side.

Well, and will this satisfy the world that is pleading so urgently for the Lord's condemnation, or those worldly desires which have gained such an ascendency over you? Will they be contented with this declaration of neutrality? Will they accept of this proposal of a middle course? You do not intend to pledge yourself rashly to the principles and the practices of the godly. You are not prepared to go all lengths with them in their extreme strictness and severity. You have no wish to take up what is called a religious profession, and to be marked out as a religious character. No! by no means. There is nothing to be apprehended on that score. Your worldly friends need not take the alarm so fast. You will not offend them. You will not separate yourself from them. And your worldly lusts may, in the meanwhile, rest assured that there is no great risk of your sacrificing any of them that are really dear to you, to your new religious sensibility. At the same time, you cannot bring your mind to declare wholly against this religion. There may be something, after all, in its high and uncompromising claim of sovereignty and of truth. There are some features in it which you admire, others which you fear,—a

few which you almost love. You cannot join in sweeping censures and denunciations against it. You cannot summarily conclude that it is all folly and madness. You may be allowed at least to treat it civilly.

Thus the case remains in suspense. And surely this understanding might appease the distressing strife. Surely your worldly habits, and worldly counsellors and tempters, need not ask more than this.

Nay, but it is not enough for them that you are not for Christ. It is not enough if you are not against him; for otherwise you are not wholly theirs. They would have you to be entirely their own,—to go along with them heartily and fully, not with hesitation and reluctance, not with misgivings and scruples,—not like one "fleeing when no man pursueth," and "in great fear where no fear is,"—but boldly and frankly. This halting, therefore, will not do. Even so measured and cautious a toleration of godliness they will not endure. You may put it to them, as an alternative, whether they will have serious religion allowed and countenanced even to so limited an extent, and on so guarded a footing, or have open profanity and profligacy let loose. You may put the very hesitating and halting regard you would still have paid to Christ, on the ground of its being preferable to the license of evil, which otherwise is to be chosen. They will almost take their risk of a jail-delivery of all crime, rather than let the religion which they dislike have free scope and play. Even if the choice is between Christ and Barabbas, they will choose Barabbas, though Barabbas be a robber.—What, then, is next to be tried?

IV. Make yet another experiment. Make the experiment of concession, and see if that will succeed. Give them, if not the cloak, at least the coat. Go with them a mile. Let Jesus, in pain and mockery, be crowned, and robed, and smitten. Perhaps that measure of compliance will content the Jews!

Yes, you will overcome your scruples so far as to allow certain liberties to be taken with religion. The profane and worldly, when they treat it with levity, can now sometimes win a smile from you. Nay, you have so much of a kind of sympathy with them as to be rather pleased than otherwise to see unseasonable gravity and sanctimonious gloom somewhat rudely handled, and solemn professors made sport of. But beyond this you are not at all inclined to go. For your secret uneasiness is increasing; you have more and more disquieting apprehensions; you have your dreams and omens, your warnings and visitations. You tremble more and more at the extremity to which you are likely to be hurried.

Still you cannot extricate yourself from the toils which the deceitfulness of sin, and this vain world, have cast around you. You are involved with those who are carrying their violence against religion to the most implacable extremes; you are committed to Christ's enemies; and any concession that you may make only emboldens them to insist on more.

But if they will thus insist on going so much farther than you can approve of, you can wash your hands, you can protest against their guilt; you, at least, are not to be blamed.

Most miserable delusion, most deplorable infatuation, of this wretched and hollow truce between light and darkness, between Christ and Belial! You wash your hands! you protest your innocence!—Idle ceremony! empty and hypocritical words! What! do you not continue still associated with the very parties whose proceedings, as you now acknowledge, are becoming offensive and alarming? Do you come out from among them? When you discover whither they are really hurrying you, do you break with them at once? No! you give them still the right hand of fellowship and the embrace of brotherhood; and, however you may save yourself by feebly protesting and washing your hands, you smile on them, you court them, you flatter them!

Most melancholy dream! And not more melancholy than false and vain! For meanwhile the world and your sins are not contented. They still press for a more explicit condemnation of Christ and his gospel. They take advantage of the compromise which you have proposed, and the concession which you have made, and they urge with greater importunity their demand, "Crucify him! Away with him!" Your uneasiness increases,—your perplexity,—your pain. The strife becomes more deadly.

And a surmise, or a hint, as to the true nature of it comes out. Jesus must be got rid of,—because he claims to be the Son of God! Here is the secret cause of offence,—the real ground of opposition to him. He is a King and a Witness to the Truth;—a King whose authority may not be set aside, a Witness whose testimony may

not be rejected,—because he is the Son of God. He claims to be so; and they who would have him crucified let out at last that it is on account of this claim they would away with him.

V. Thus, as the prolonged struggle begets impatience and irritation, the mask at last drops, and the deep source of the outcry against Jesus comes out. The adversaries lose their self-possession, and, pressing for a decision, show what really is at the bottom of their enmity, and what it is in his claims that most provokes them,—he makes himself the Son of God. The judge also, taking the alarm anew—once more tossed on a sea of doubt, and not knowing what to make of the expressive and emphatic silence of the accused—loses temper, and affects to end the whole by a mere bravado and boast of power: 'Am I not the master of this King—this Son of God. May I not use my discretion in disposing of him and his pretensions? Have I not power to condemn and power to release, as I see fit?'

In the instance of Pilate, this menace is the last and impotent struggle of an uneasy conscience sorely and hardly pressed by convictions and appeals to which it will not submit, and of which it cannot get rid. It is an affectation or assumption of bravery which he does not really feel,—a desperate effort to cover or to overcome, by an ostentatious attitude of defiance, the secret misgivings of a quailing spirit. The feeblest victim of the chase, when, after all his shiftings and windings, he is brought at last to stand at bay, will turn upon his pursuers

and emit some expiring flashes of rage. Baited and maddened by the prolonged pursuit, he will face his unrelenting foes and give fight ere he yields and dies. So the poor sinner, whom the claims of religion are dogging so closely and importunately at his heels, after vainly seeking to evade or to escape from them, becomes petulant and indignant, and almost thinks that he does well to be angry! Is there to be no end of this annoyance? Is he to be thus harassed for ever? And now when he would bring the matter to a point, and therefore puts an explicit question, "Whence art thou?" he receives no answer—Jesus is silent. Has he not a right to be vexed? And why, after all, should he suffer his peace to be disturbed when he can put an end to the whole question at once? Why continue to be dunned by the solicitations of these Jews; and, especially, why allow one who is wholly at his mercy to keep him thus endlessly on the rack of a painful suspense? He will change his tone. What! has he not a right, after all, to take his own way, and do as he pleases? He will settle the affair off-hand, and so have done with it.

A state of mind like this is more common than some may be ready to suppose,—when men attempt, as it were, to face down the uncomfortable remonstrances and suggestions of conscience, and by putting on, as it is called, a bold front, abruptly end internal deliberations of which they are weary. This is seen in their way of dealing with the general question of religion's claims upon them, as well as with particular questions of duty which arise in regard to their employment of their time and

talents. The flesh, with its lusts and passions; the world, with its deceitful pleasures; the devil, with his seductive wiles;—all come and clamorously demand that you make a sacrifice to them of your religious principles, and give up, as incompatible with the actual condition of life, that vital godliness which, however good in itself, seems too visionary to be here realized. On the other hand, the Son of God stands before you; and though he does not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets; though he is led as a Lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth,—his very silence awes the conscience. And the heart too is sometimes touched, when, meek and lowly in heart himself, he says, "Come unto me, ye weary." At such seasons, you feel as if you were more than half inclined to comply at once with the affectionate call, and end the strife of your soul by casting yourself unreservedly into his arms, and consenting to be wholly his. You almost wish that you could make up your mind to be fairly and thoroughly religious, and to cast in your lot with the godly. But again you are pressed on the other side. You are peremptorily and importunately solicited to let religion go, and accommodate yourself to the world; and they who solicit you will not easily take a denial. You are in straits, you are at a loss,—what is to be done?

And here there is a fallacy into which you are very prone to fall—the very fallacy by which Pilate deceived himself into the idea that he had ground of complaint against the Lord Jesus, when he said, "Speakest thou

not unto me?" This same religion, that so urges you, will not speak so articulately as you would wish. It seems to present its claims to you in a form too vague and indefinite. You want something more precise and explicit: 'Who is it, after all, that you are? What is it that you would have? "How long dost thou hold us in suspense? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly."'

For there is no feature in the gospel which more sorely perplexes and provokes unrenewed and worldly men than this alleged indistinctness. The demands which it makes have a certain character of large, vast, and unlimited extent, which they cannot easily grasp. If it were something more specific and more tangible that it asked, they would know better how to deal with it. Hence, to such persons, even the most painful system of penance, and the most burdensome routine of forms, will be more intelligible and more welcome than the free grace of the gospel. They desire a religion which will just tell them at once what is to be done, and then let them alone. They wish to know the utmost range of its claims upon them, that they may get through what is necessary to meet them, and then be free. They feel always as if, in pressing upon them the gospel, we were not coming to the point—as if we were dealing in vague generalities. They call for something more particular and practical. Just prescribe to them at once, in so many precise terms, their creed and their task—what they are to believe, and what they are to do—and so let there be an end of it.

This is the very longing, this is the very craving, of

the natural mind, which Popery is so skilfully contrived to satisfy. It relieves men of the responsibility of an indefinite obligation in religion; it exacts from them the acknowledgment of a certain formal authority, and the fulfilment of certain formal conditions, and, as to all beyond, it simply lets them off. This is what men seek, —to have the claims of religion put into a tangible shape, and marked out by exact limits; and for this they will consent to pay a very considerable price, in the way of service or of sacrifice, to any church that will thus define and circumscribe their duty. In fact, this is the religion which, in whatever church, men commonly try to make for themselves. You have your statutory or customary round of duty to which you bind yourself—a certain decent acquiescence in the form of sound words which you hear,—a certain measure of attendance on outward ordinances,—a certain reverence for things sacred, and a punctual performance of certain pious offices. So much as this, religion seems fairly entitled to require; and, having so far acknowledged and complied with its requirements, you would fain be let alone and suffered to take your ease.

And so you might take your ease, but for the apprehension which ever and anon haunts you, that there may, after all, be something more in the gospel than this—that there may be some depth which you have not yet fathomed. The very enemies of true religion suggest to you this apprehension. They let out their jealousy of the Lord Jesus because he is the Son of God. You cannot help suspecting that there must be more in his

claims than at first appeared, since so strong a feeling of dislike on their part is manifested;—especially when you experience the difficulty of any compromise, and perceive how hard it is to reconcile the importunate demands of the world with anything like respect and reverence for religion, or the safe preservation of any of its life in your soul. You begin to be convinced that it may be a very different kind and amount of homage that it requires from any that you have hitherto thought of rendering. Jesus stands before you,—the King, the Witness to the Truth, the Son of God.. May he not have rights in you, and over you, to an extent hitherto unrecognised and unconceived?

But here again the complaint comes in of the vague and indefinite character of what he claims. There is an air of mystery about him. He does not speak out plainly and explicitly enough. You are unhappy, uneasy, dissatisfied,—angry. You have the idea of some unknown discovery which it may deeply concern you to make,—some unknown heavenly majesty with which you ought to be acquainted. But you know not how to proceed, or to which hand to turn. This religion of which you hear so much,—what precisely, and whence is it? What, definitely, would it have of you? It will not further explain itself. But still there it stands, and the solemn impression of its high and undefined authority remains, and cannot be got rid of. What, in these circumstances, is to be done?

Weary of this uncertainty, provoked by this apparent mystery, you determine to break up the useless conference, to break off the unsatisfactory negotiation. After all,

this religion is a matter under your own power. It rests with you to dispose of it at your discretion; and, if it will not come to terms or to an understanding with you, assume you the mastery over it,—assert your right to treat it as you choose.

Thus you would gladly terminate the strife. And there are many who in this attempt partially and for a time succeed. They keep the Lord Jesus at a distance, and in abeyance. They affect to deal with him and his holy and spiritual religion as if he and it were at their mercy, left to their arbitrary disposal,—as if they had a kind of title to make of both of them what they please; so that any respect shown on their part to vital godliness must be considered as a favour,—an act almost of grace and condescension. That they do not at once condemn Jesus, —that they tolerate his claims even for a moment,—that they pay him the compliment of listening to him at all,— is a great stretch of courtesy, for which they duly take credit. They might, if they chose, adopt far more decided measures against him. They might give the word or the hint, and there would be plenty of his enemies ready to revile, to scourge, to crucify him. Religion is really indebted to them for their forbearance, and for the decent homage which they render to it. They confer an obligation on Christ and on his cause by going so far as they do go,— nay, by simply abstaining from going against him,—which if they did, the loss would be his. Let him beware, then, of driving them to this extremity. Let religion beware of making its high and mysterious demands on them so unpalatable as to put them to the necessity of withdrawing

even the countenance and support which they now give, and leaving it to take its chance without their patronage.

Vain, impotent, and impious pride, of the poor potsherds of the earth! What! and do you really fancy that the Lord is indebted and obliged to you, because you are graciously pleased not to turn your power wholly against him?—that he must purchase your forbearance by concession, and bow his head to you, lest you should be provoked to declare more openly against him than you do? Nay, but know, O vain man! that He who sitteth in the heavens laughs, (Ps. ii.) The Lord holds such haughty bearing in derision. Yes; and he will speak to you in his wrath. What! dost thou think that it is as a criminal at thy bar, a suppliant at thy footstool, that the Son of God standeth before thee? Is he not thy Lord, thy King? He, indeed, dependent upon thee! Thou worm of the earth, He challenges thee to do thy worst! Yes, use thy power against Him, if it seem to thee good;—only remember it is at thy peril—it is on thy responsibility. And think not, though thou givest up the Saviour, thou canst have peace. No, thy weakness, thy imbecility, is still thy curse. Thou carriest to thy grave the sting of an uneasy mind. Thou hast not succeeded in braving and bullying either thy conscience or thy God. Thou art driven at last to desperate measures,—to suicide or self-murder itself; to the worst form of suicide,—the hardening of thine own heart,—the destroying of thine own soul. Only in spiritual death wilt thou find that end of thy strife which the miserable Roman was fain to seek by imbruing his hands in his own blood.

But enough of this. The parallel between Pilate in a great strait between the Jews and Jesus, and a worldly man struggling in the grasp of certain spiritual convictions which he cannot shake off, and to which his worldly lusts will not suffer him to yield, might be followed up at greater length and in much more minute detail. It is a painfully interesting study, and it suggests not a few important practical lessons. One in particular may be noticed.

If the question be once fairly and seriously raised between Christ and his enemies, or between the claims of vital Christianity and the demands of the world, neutrality becomes impossible,—neither party will suffer it. Christ, on his part, cannot endure it: the authority with which he speaks,—the Truth of which he is the Witness,—the relation in which he stands to God as his Son, and to men as their Saviour, Sovereign, and Lord, are all of such a kind as to forbid his being satisfied with anything short of a full and unreserved acknowledgment of his claims.

But the point of the moral lies rather in the consideration, that the world on its side is as intolerant of neutrality as is the gospel of Christ itself. Let the question come to a trial before you, and the world will never let you off until it extorts from you a sentence against the Lord. Your inclinations, your convictions, your good feelings of every sort, may be all in favour of some middle course. But it is all in vain. You cannot long escape. You are at the mercy of evil principles and evil men with whom you are not prepared to break; and, as you will not give

them up for Christ, the issue is too plain and certain on the other side,—you cannot but in the end sacrifice Christ to them. There is, therefore, no safety in a neutral position—neither the prince of this world nor the Prince of Life will let you rest in it. There must be a decision for or against the Lord. "He that is not with me is against me." Let the inevitable alternative be pondered well.

And not only let the decision be on the side of Christ,—let it be also on the side of Christ as having authority. Too often is the question weighed between him and his enemies in the spirit of haughty or headstrong independence; as if he were at our mercy and disposal,—as if we had an absolute discretion, and might own or reject him at our pleasure. He seems to stand before us at our bar, awaiting our verdict; or we conceive of him as if he were to be obliged to us for a little water, such as he asked of the woman at the well of Samaria; or for a courteous act of hospitality, such as he accepted in the Pharisee's house when he sat down to meat with him. No wonder that our decision in reference to his claims partakes of the character of compromise and evasion, when we regard him as thus a suppliant merely, or an accused person, at our gate. But let us conceive of him as he stood before Pilate, in high and holy majesty; or as he appeared to Saul on the way to Damascus, in the glory of his divine sovereignty and grace; and our attitude will be that of Saul,—prostrate on the ground before him; and our language also will be that of Saul,—"Lord, what wouldest thou have me to do?" Let us hear his word to

the woman of Samaria,—"If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." And let each one echo the woman's prayer, with intelligent, prompt, and guileless faith,—"Lord, give me this water, that I thirst not."

APPENDIX.

NOTE.—Page 318.

I AM tempted to republish here a portion of a little work, doomed I suppose to oblivion,—namely, my Letters to Mr. Elliott on some passages in his "Horæ Apocalypticæ." In my argument with him regarding the constitution of the Church of Christ on earth, and its claim of freedom from the control of the civil power, I found myself brought into contact with "the famous text," as Mr. Elliott calls it, "My kingdom is not of this world;" and I was led to make the following observations upon it, which I reprint without any change, believing that they sufficiently explain themselves:—

It is a remarkable scene which that "judgment-hall," or chamber of private audience, in the governor's palace, presents. Pilate and Jesus are seen confronting one another, alone: apart from the accusing Jews, who remained, through all the trial, on the stairs, or in the vestibule, without. Pilate, then, and Jesus, are met face to face: Pilate representing the majesty of earth,—Jesus the majesty of heaven: Pilate set in defence of the prerogatives of human governments,—Jesus asserting a divine prerogative of his own. The State and the Church are brought together: the State, in the person of one who wields the power of the Roman Emperor, the ruler of the world,—the Church, in the person of her great Head. And the business to be transacted is nothing less than the adjustment of their respective claims. I believe that nearly all the essential elements of a right adjustment of these claims may be found in the brief conversation that ensues.

Thus, in the first place, the Lord declares that he is a king, and that he has a kingdom. And I repeat that this must imply a purpose to have a visible society upon earth, organized in his name. That was the only sense in which his being a king, and having a kingdom, could be a matter with which Pilate

had anything to do: and I own I cannot conceive of Christ using such language as that now before us, if he did not wish it to be understood of an actual, outstanding community, about to be formed in the world. He did intend to set up a commonwealth of his own, and to exercise authority in it, just as ostensibly as other kings do. This, therefore, seems to be sufficient warrant for the doctrine, that the visible Church is a divine institution; and that Christ exercises full royal authority in it, governing it by distinct laws and distinct officers of his own,—laws and officers as distinct from those of civil governments, as the arrangements of one earthly king are from those of another.

Then, secondly, the Lord intimates that this kingdom or society of his, which he is to govern as King, by laws and officers of his own, differs from other kingdoms, inasmuch as being "not of this world," but spiritual and heavenly, in its professed character and objects, it has not, and ought not to have, any of this world's authority or power intrusted to it. In particular, no civil authority belongs to it, and no power of the sword; or, in other words, no branch of the visible Church has any right,—nor can it lawfully usurp or receive any right,—to decide civil causes, or to use violence, conscience alone being the single principle by which it is to act and to maintain itself.

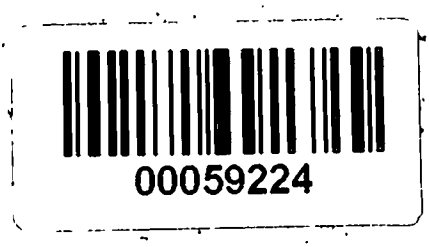
But yet, thirdly, the Lord makes the domain of conscience very wide and universal. For he goes on, in the immediately following verse, to claim and challenge the allegiance of Pilate himself to this kingdom of his. It is a kingdom—a government or sovereignty—depending not at all on the force of arms, but wholly on the force of truth: its King is the witness to the truth: it appeals not to physical coercion, or constraint, but exclusively to conscience. It appeals, however, through the truth of which its King is the witness, to the conscience of every one,—of rulers as well as subjects,—of Pilate himself as well as others. The princes of this world, therefore—all civil rulers and governors—are, in their official capacity, and not merely as private persons, bound to hear the voice of this King,—to own the truth of which he is the witness, and to acknowledge the kingdom of which he is the Governor.

And hence, in the fourth place, as the Lord emphatically teaches, they are peculiarly responsible to God for the manner in which they deal with his Son, and with the kingdom which his Son sets up,—a kingdom in, though not of, the world. For when Pilate,—hard pressed between his own convictions on the one hand, and the bloodthirsty cry of the Jews on the other,—turns rudely round upon the meek prisoner before him, and boasts of his power to do with Jesus what he pleased—how does the Lord reply to him? 'That power thou doubtless hast. But whence derived? From God: "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." And thou art thinking to use the power received from God against the Son of God!' This

was a fearful aggravation of the traitor's sin,—that he called forth a power ordained of God to crush the Son of God: "Therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." 'It must be an aggravation, also, of thy guilt, if thou fallest into his snare,—and into his condemnation.'

Pilate here represents the princes of this world: and what the Lord says to him, applies to them. Their power is not superseded or abridged by the setting up of Christ's kingdom, or by his claim of sovereignty. Neither on his own part, personally, nor for his visible Church under him, does he challenge any right to control civil rulers, even as to their treatment of himself and that very Church. These rulers are left to their own discretion, to act upon their own responsibility. Their duty, however, is plain,—and their interest and safety, too;—to "kiss the Son" (Ps. ii. 10-12); to own publicly and officially the truth to which he bears witness; and to respect and hold sacred his separate and independent authority in that kingdom, or visible Church, which he rules by statutes and magistrates of his own. In a word, he does not interfere with them in their kingdoms, nor should they interfere with him in his.

These, in substance, are our Church principles; denying the power of the sword to the Church, and the power of the keys to the civil magistrate. That power of the keys, in our view of it, is simply the right to determine who shall be members, and who shall be officers, of the Christian society. It is not, therefore, in reality, very formidable. No doubt, it is easy to create a vague fear of undefined and irresponsible ecclesiastical supremacy; and it is easy, also, to cast a mist around a plain doctrine, by exaggerating the difficulty of distinguishing between things civil and things ecclesiastical. Both of these artifices were very plentifully used against us when we were contending for our principles within the Scottish Establishment; and I am not surprised that they should have had their effect in influencing your view of our position since we left it. But stript of all its technicalities, and of the details of endless legal subtlety, our claim really never amounted to more than this,—that it belongs to the visible Church herself, according to her own views of duty, guided by the word and Spirit of God alone, to say who shall be admitted to membership, and who shall be admitted to office, within her communion; that is, not merely to admit, by whatever ceremony, but to judge who shall be admitted. The Erastianism which we condemn, is a direct refusal of this claim.



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